PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

AUGUST 2010

The Official Magazine

SACK ATTACK!

LittleBigPlanet 2

New friends! Better tools! More fun!

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PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 35 (August 2010)

BLACK OPS

VOLUME: 11!
ROCK BAND 3

30
BEST FIREARMS FATSOS AND FEMMES FATALES

REVIEWED!
METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER

+
Deus Ex
Killzone 3
Madden 11
Bulletstorm
Red Faction
Harry Potter
Driver SF

Take that, NASA! We found life [illegible] p.12

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CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Fantasy Violence
Language
Suggestive Themes

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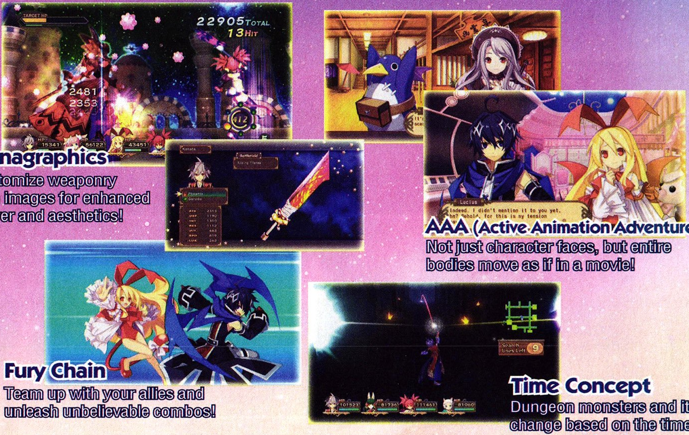

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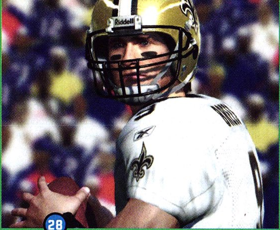
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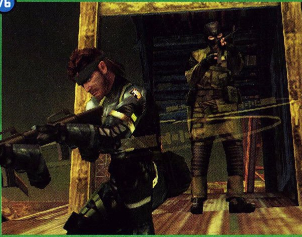

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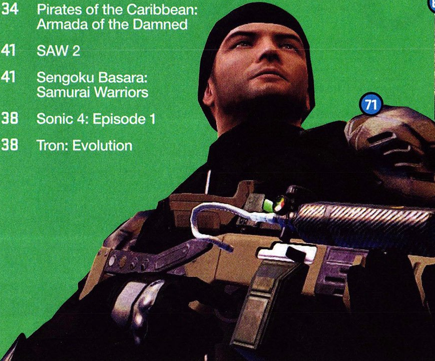


→ Take What You Want

In my spare time, I've been known to do many things. Among them, in no particular order: reading comics, writing, bill-paying, spending time with my family, fancy shoe shopping, cooking, exercising (not enough), watching TV, sleeping (not enough), crocheting (for real), and even playing the occasional videogame or two.

Absent from this list: making my own game.

Despite having spent a dozen years in and around the games industry, and perhaps a dozen more playing them before I landed my first gig as a gaming magazine editor, I never felt that bug. I love games. And I love magazines. And I love making magazines about games. But I simply have no desire to make my own *game*.

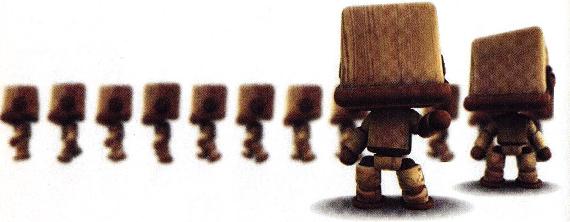
Which brings us to this month's cover. *LittleBigPlanet 2* isn't just a charming platformer. It's a platform itself for creative expression, with a whopping 2.3 million levels already having been created by the robust *LBP* community. And while there's plenty to skip over, there's also an impressive amount of killer content—awesome enough, in fact, that several amateur level-designers were plucked right out of the community and hired by developer Media Molecule based on their home-brew efforts. That's pretty darn cool.

Now *LBP2* comes along, and it not only offers better tools, but easier ones as well. And it got me thinking: maybe I will, finally, jump into amateur development and show the world what *I* can do.

But probably not. I love playing games, and I can't wait to try everything *you* all create. When it comes to videogames, I'm a taker, not a giver—and I adore *LBP* for giving me so much to take.

GARY

Gary Steinman | Editor in Chief
www.twitter.com/TinyManRages



The Team ↘

GARY STEINMAN
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Trapped in time, surrounded by evil, and low on tolerance for the comma splice, supereditor Gary Steinman punishes evil and freelancers' bad grammar with the atomic elbow of justice, oftentimes while eating the tri-tip sandwich of impertinence.

NOW PLAYING: *Alpha Protocol, Red Dead Redemption, MGS: Peace Walker*

GREG ORLANDO
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Love and Cheez Doodles created America's sweetheart, Greg Orlando. Sadly, Chuck Norris had to destroy him. In life, he taught us all to lambada, the forbidden dance. In death, no offense, PTOM could really use a shovel and a plot of land somewhere.

NOW PLAYING: *Toy Story 3, Red Dead Redemption, Split/Second*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Art director Ken Bousquet once staved off a Saracen invasion—*while he was looking for loose change for the soda machine.* If poor layout is the disease, rest assured that Ken (You call him Mr. Bousquet!) is indeed the cure.

NOW PLAYING: *Split/Second, 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

Our vaguely introspective Managing Editor never wanted to sell anything, buy anything, or process anything as a career—or sell anything bought or processed, or buy anything sold or processed, or process anything sold, bought, or processed. Fail.

NOW PLAYING: *Blur, Just Cause 2, LEGO Star Wars*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Assistant Editor Scott Butterworth came here to chew bubblegum and kick ass. Fortunately, PTOM enjoys an ample supply of all varieties of chewing gum, and Scott has been successfully placated. For the forseeable future, no asses will be kicked.

NOW PLAYING: *Red Dead Redemption, Green Day: RB, Peace Walker*

THE DAVID MURPHY
EDITORIAL INTERN

Intern cum cautionary tale Daniel "David" Murphy reminds us all it's never a good idea to wrestle a bear for a donut inside a shark tank while wearing a meat suit. His love is real, or it would be were his heart not being digested by a Moray eel.

NOW PLAYING: *Shrek Forever After, Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep*

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Stories that everyone's talking about

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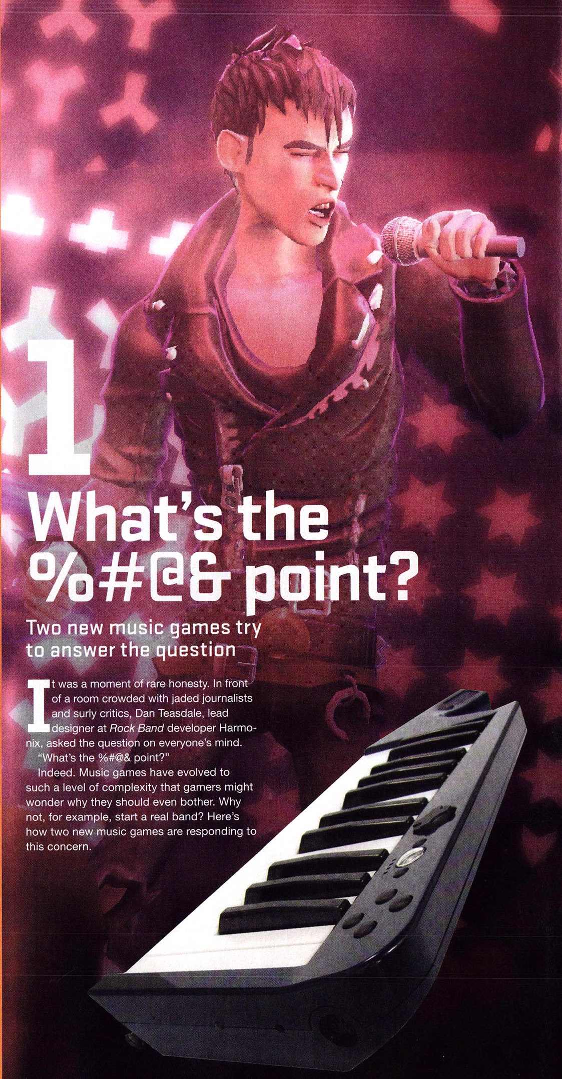


1

What's the %#@& point?

Two new music games try to answer the question

It was a moment of rare honesty. In front of a room crowded with jaded journalists and surly critics, Dan Teasdale, lead designer at *Rock Band* developer Harmonix, asked the question on everyone's mind.

"What's the %#@& point?"

Indeed. Music games have evolved to such a level of complexity that gamers might wonder why they should even bother. Why not, for example, start a real band? Here's how two new music games are responding to this concern.

ROCK BAND 3

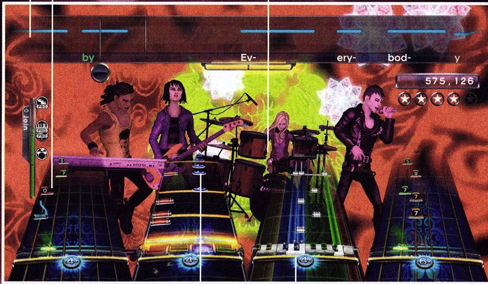
It started with a mandate: let's change the conversation about music games. The goal: to build the ultimate *Rock Band* that will stand the test of time. Nothing is sacred. Everything is on the table.

That meant fixing anything gamers didn't like, starting with the instrument selection options. New to *Rock Band 3:* the ability to drop in and drop out anywhere in the game, on any controller. Better yet, each player now has a personal tab-like menu to select his options, clearing out a lot of onscreen space.

Other changes include a customizable touring mode—what Teasdale describes as the previous game's Band World Tour meets *Mario Party.* Players can set up gigs, including the number of songs, and they'll be challenged to react to a variety of audiences who might expect different kinds of performances (showy vs. accurate, for example). The whole experience can be completed in an evening, but can be replayed at any time.

Then there are the peripherals, starting with the all-new keyboard: a full-functioning, MIDI instrument that not only feels like the real deal, but adds new dimensions to the gameplay. The guitar has also been improved, with a matrix of six strings and 17 frets. Yep, that's 102 buttons. Which brings us to the biggest change of all: Rock Band Pro.

Harmonix knows its game can't churn out musical virtuosos, but in focus testing, the team found the new Pro mode can turn a non-musician into a functional campfire player in just an hour. On easier settings, Pro pushes a carefully curated selection of single notes. On medium settings, players start jamming on power chords. And Expert delivers the full song—what Teasdale describes as "an insane sh-tstorm of music coming at you." (Pro mode also covers drums and keyboards.) Skills learned in Pro mode translate to genuine music skills, Teasdale promises, adding that the real musicians at Harmonix tended to perform better than the hardcore *Rock Band* players.



Like the Beatles and Green Day games, *Rock Band 3* features three-part vocal harmonies (where applicable…like, not here).

Pro mode offers different difficulties, but each setting still mirrors the song's actual notes. Think of it as playing tablature in real time.

All previous DLC and on-disc music will be compatible with *Rock Band 3,* though we don't know if it will all be playable in Pro mode.

The game now distinguishes between cymbals and drums in all play modes from easy to Pro.

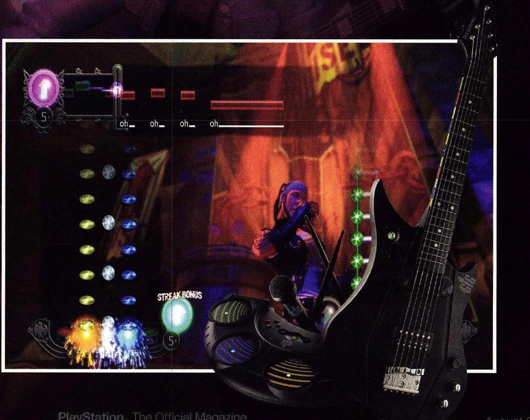
Don't worry, Pro mode is only an option. The traditional *Rock Band* gameplay is still available.

POWER GIG: RISE OF THE SIX STRING

Taking a totally different tack, new developer Seven45 Studios is differentiating itself by replacing the standard plastic toy guitar with an actual musical instrument. Their fully functioning electric guitar converts into a game controller with a single switch—and though the team insists they're not delivering a teaching tool, they do point out that using the guitar will help gamers develop basic skills like finger strength and strumming ability. *Power Gig* also includes a chording mode, allowing players to use real chords in the gameplay.

Even more intriguing: the AirStrike drum. Using a base unit that's placed on the floor (flat or on an elevated stand), gamers basically air-drum using special sticks. Seven45 feels this delivers a more authentic drumming experience, eliminating the "distracting sounds" of banging on rubber pads. They also suggest the AirStrike allows for a freer range of realistic drumming motions.

Their goal is to deliver an authentic music experience free from hitting buttons or drum pads, and they're complementing the experience by including licensed original masters from four major record labels. More than 90 percent of the game's music has never appeared before, including three exclusive artists who previously hadn't participated in the genre due to philosophical differences with other music games: Kid Rock, Dave Matthews Band, and Eric Clapton.



2

Back in the Zone

Sony shows off *Killzone 3* in 3D

Guerrilla Games considers *Killzone 3* another take on the biblical tale of David vs. Goliath. "Only Goliath has brought thousands of troops and a nuclear arsenal," says Herman Hulst, managing director for Guerrilla.

Hulst promises a "truly colossal campaign" for *Killzone 3,* one that includes the standard bullet-points: more vehicles, more weapons, more set pieces, and revamped close-quarters combat system. More impressively, the game will be fully playable in three-dimensions, although a 3D TV set and special glasses are required.

The game, which should see release from Sony in 2011, takes place amid a war between the Interplanetary Strategic Alliance (ISA) and the Helghast. *Killzone 3* picks up as the Helghast are caught in a power vacuum, with two leaders vying for control. Nonetheless, the ISA forces on Helghan are severely outnumbered and facing a reinvigorated foe.

Gameplay revealed Helghast warriors hovering and darting through the sky on jetpacks; they'll slam down on their foes if they get a chance. ISA soldiers can access their own jetpacks, leaping across great distances or raining down death from above. Guerrilla's new "brutal melee system" is aptly named, as it allows for ISA soldiers to take their combat knives and gouge out a Helghast's eyes. Other close-quarter strikes involved a knife stabbing through a target's heart, bludgeonings with a rifle butt, and various other fatalities involving painfully sharp objects being twisted and dragged across various body parts. The brief demo offered five different melee kills; Guerrilla representatives promised this number represented only a small portion of the brutal kills available in *Killzone 3.*

Three-dimensional play proved intriguing, with bits of junk being thrown up at the screen as a Helghast derrick was systematically wrecked. There was also something inherently neat about seeing the protagonist's hands in relation to objects in the background. This sort of gimmickry combined with *Killzone's* heritage may well be irresistible.

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3 Snake Bites

Prepare for *Peace Walker* with this foolproof *Metal Gear* primer

The Philosophers and The Patriots. Solid Snake and Naked Snake. The Boss and Big Boss. With all the crazy twist and turns the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise has taken over the years, how could anyone possibly keep it all straight and still make sense of whatever *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* has in store? Well don't worry. We've created the world's most straightforward guide to the twisting conspiracies of the *Metal Gear* universe so you'll know all your Snakes from your Bosses.

1964

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (PS2)
An elite American solider codenamed Naked Snake earns the title Big Boss after killing his defected mentor, The Boss, in order to avert a nuclear crisis. He discovers, however, that her betrayal was faked in an attempt to obtain The Philosophers' Legacy, a secret world government's $100 billion fund.

1970

Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops (PSP)
Big Boss' former special-ops group breaks from the CIA in order to become a military state and launch a nuclear weapon at the U.S., ostensibly to destroy The Philosophers. Big Boss thwarts this plot, but mysterious double (possibly triple) agent Ocelot manages to obtain documents that reveal The Philosophers' identities.

1974

Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker (PSP)
Big Boss founds Soldiers Without Borders, a state-less peacekeeping unit. Around this time, the American branch of The Philosophers recovers part of the Legacy, becoming The Patriots. Soon afterwards, Big Boss is secretly cloned.

1995-1999

Metal Gear (NES, PS2) and Metal Gear 2 (MSX2, PS2)
Solid Snake—a clone of Big Boss—is sent by the CIA to infiltrate a nuclear-equipped rogue military state known as Outer Heaven only to discover that its leader is in fact Big Boss. Solid Snake defeats Big Boss on two separate occasions, apparently killing him.

ULTRA
METAL GEAR
REV - A

2005

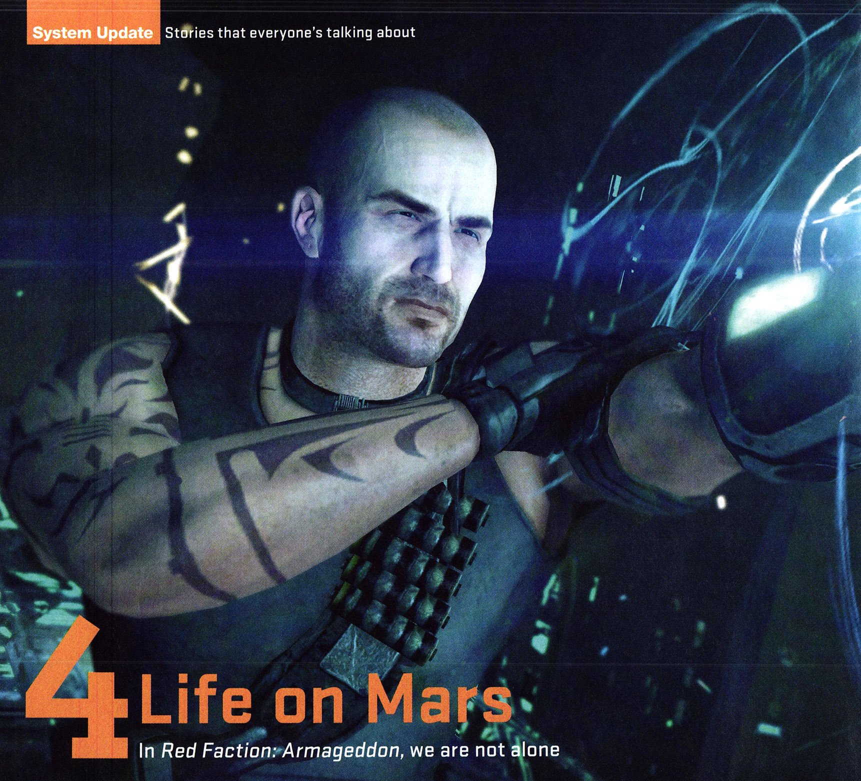
Metal Gear Solid (PSone)
A second Big Boss clone, Liquid Snake, steals a tank that's armed with a nuclear warhead and demands Big Boss' remains but is killed by Solid before his demands are met.

2009

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (PS2)
The Patriots engineer a terrorist attack to train Raiden—a member of the same spec-ops group that sent Solid Snake to Outer Heaven—as the next Big Boss. During the mission, Raiden rescues the president of the United States, who claims that The Patriots have complete control over the U.S. government. After helping Raiden avoid another global catastrophe, Solid Snake leaves to track down and kill The Patriots using data recovered during the mission.

2014

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots (PS3)
AI cores created by The Patriots take control of the world by manipulating global conflicts. Solid's longtime enemy Ocelot reveals that he has hypnotized himself to become Liquid and plans to destroy and replace the AI cores to become the dominant global power. Snake kills him, freeing the world and exposing The Patriots' founders in the process.



4 Life on Mars

In *Red Faction: Armageddon*, we are not alone

It's not enough to destroy the Earth. We just had to destroy Mars too.

That's the premise behind *Red Faction: Armageddon,* the fourth in THQ's long-running series, due out March 2011. In the previous game, *Guerrilla,* we played as Alec Mason, a mining engineer who joins the resistance against the oppressive Earth Defense Force. Now, some 60 years later, we step into the boots of Alec's grandson Darius, as we head deep underground. After destroying the surface of the red planet, it was the only place left to go.

Once again, destruction plays a key role, but this time we're promised a more creative approach to the rampant dismantling. That's thanks in part to the massive but enclosed underground environments. "Imagine firing a series of explosives at a cluster of large ventilation pipes at the top of a cave," says Jim Boone, senior producer at developer Volition. "The explosives detonate, raining metal and debris on the enemies below, which crushes them in the process. This is one example of how we're laying out the world to help enhance destruction." Of course, if we still want to simply blow things up real good, that's fine too. "As the title *Armageddon* suggests, hell has already been unleashed on the world. If the player decides to destroy things just to have some fun, the setting will certainly be conducive toward that end."

But it's not just destruction. Also new: the nanoforge, which can rebuild any man-made structure—even one Darius didn't destroy himself. For example, if Darius stumbles into an area where an intense fight has taken place, he can quickly repair a short barricade that can then be used to provide modest cover for combat. And then there's the magnet gun, which works great in tandem with the nanoforge. Start with a large concrete wall, then fire a shot at that wall followed by a connecting shot at a distant enemy. "Our destruction engine allows the magnet gun to rip a giant slab of concrete wall from the building and then hurtles it straight into the enemy, with predictable results," Boone says. "Where it gets really fun is when you then quickly use your nanoforge to repair the concrete wall, providing you instant ammo to use with the magnet gun on the next enemy."

All this is set in a series of interconnected caves, both manmade and natural, with varying environmental hazards, like ice and magma. But the biggest hazard of all—and the crux of *Armageddon's* story—is the discovery that we are not alone. Someone—or some*thing*—is also down below, and it's up to Darius to fight off this new threat in order to save both humanity and restore the surface of Mars.

5

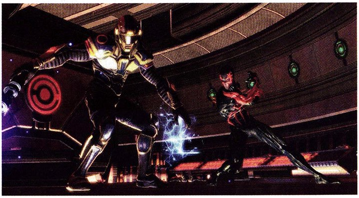
Web Ahead

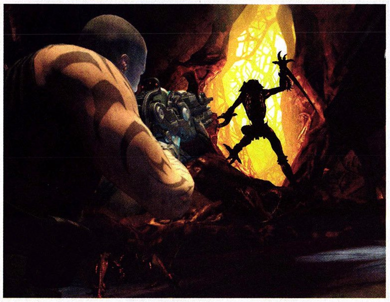
Third webslinger revealed in *Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions*

Offering a four-fold look at the Marvel Comics hero, *Spider-Man*: *Shattered Dimensions* supposes a magical artifact has been, well, shattered and four separate versions of Spider-Man must each retrieve a piece of it. Previously, publisher Activision revealed that two of the game's four Spider-Men were the original Spider-Man and the moody, leather-clad Spider-Man noir.

Now, Activision has revealed the third Spider-Man, and he's the futuristic version of the hero seen in *Spider-Man 2099.* In this quarter of the game, players will be treated to a New York in the not-too-distant future, one wherein scientist Miguel O'Hara has taken over as Spider-Man. The 2099 stages will feature mid-air battles (thanks to Spidey's limited flight capabilities) and a villain created just for *Dimensions:* the Hobgoblin of the future. The gameplay is meant to contrast with the stealth-based noir sequences and the more straightforward classic Spider-Man action. With the 2099 Spider-Man, players can also access the hero's superhuman senses, which enable him to move quickly, as if time had been slowed.

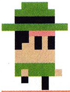
We expect Activision will announce the fourth and final Spider-Man shortly before the game's September release. While the smart money's on the Ultimate universe Spider-Man, we can't help but hope for Peter Porker, the Spectacular Spider-Ham.

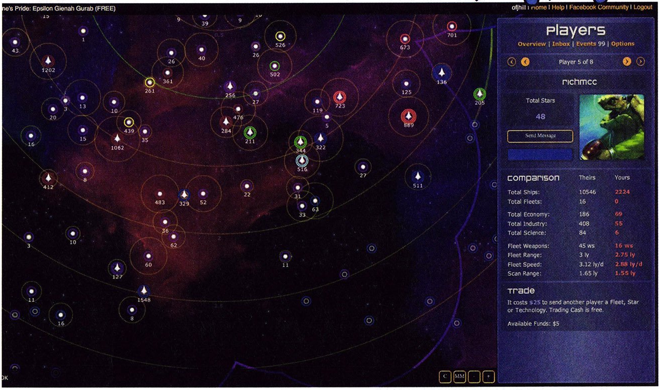




6 Flash Attack!

We pick a dozen favorite Flash-game freebies that can be played through the PS3's built-in browser




ne's Pride: Epsilon Gienah Gurab (FREE)
ofjhill | Home | Help | Facebook Community | Logout
C
MM
-
+

Players

Overview | Inbox | Events 99 | Options

Player 5 of 8

richmcc

Total Stars: 48

Send Message

comparison	Theirs	Yours
Total Ships:	10546	2224
Total Fleets:	16	0
Total Economy:	186	69
Total Industry:	408	55
Total Science:	84	6
Fleet Weapons:	45 ws	16 ws
Fleet Range:	3 ly	2.75 ly
Fleet Speed:	3.12 ly/d	2.88 ly/d
Scan Range:	1.65 ly	1.55 ly

Trade

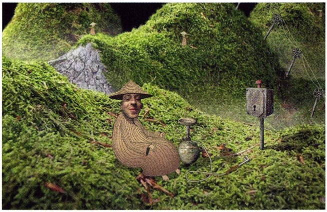
It costs $25 to send another player a Fleet, Star or Technology. Trading Cash is free.

Available Funds: $5

NEPTUNE'S PRIDE

URL: np.ironhelmet.com

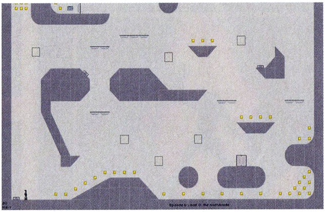
Think of this as a space-themed version of Risk that moves at a glacial pace (matches last weeks, not hours). Even though we're only required to log in every day or two, the remainder of our time is spent scheming with our allies before eventually betraying them. It's easy to plan and implement moves with a PS3 controller, though typing out a message can be a bit time consuming without a keyboard. A must-play for strategy fans with plenty of spare time on their hands.



SAMOROST

URL: bit.ly/d0f7H

A surreal, inventive, and stylish adventure game from the makers of critically acclaimed PC hit *Machinarium.* A must-play for fans of point-and-clickers.



N

URL: bit.ly/c6JrLH (1080p) | bit.ly/9hYsDd (720p)

This superb puzzle platformer is optimized for different resolutions and plays like a dream. Lots of people paid for this on Xbox 360 and PSP when it got officially released.

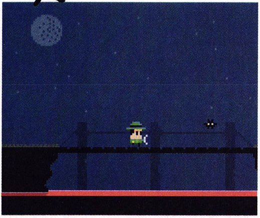
BROWSER FAQ

So how do I get started?
First, log into your PSN account, scroll to the Network section, and open the browser with the X button. Then press Start to open an address bar before entering the URL. Click R3 on the window to zoom in and, if necessary, fine-tune the view with the right-analog stick. Test the game and, if you like it, hit Select to bookmark. You can even set one of them to your homepage by pressing Triangle and scrolling to tools, then homepage. During play, the X button works as a left-click and the D-pad replaces your keyboard's cursor keys.

I get occasional slowdown or memory messages. Help!?
You might need to clear your cache. Bring up the menu by pressing Triangle, then scroll to Tools and press X. We also recommend that you only have one window open at a time. Check this by pressing L3.

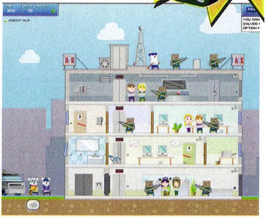
I've found Flash games that don't work on PS3.
PS3's latest firmware supports Flash 9, but 10 just got released for PC/Mac browsers. Eventually PS3 will catch up, but until then you'll need to use your desktop/laptop PC.

Can I use my USB keyboard instead?
Yes. And if you've got one you should play *Canabalt* (bit.ly/qz8HT)—we omitted it because you need to press keys to get it started. A full keyboard will also come in handy for making and breaking *Neptune's Pride* alliances.



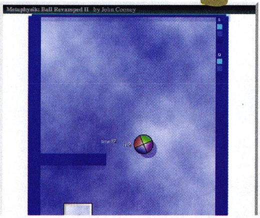
ONE BUTTON BOB
URL: bit.ly/aY9fAR

Players only have to push X for the entirety of this cute and inventive platform adventure.



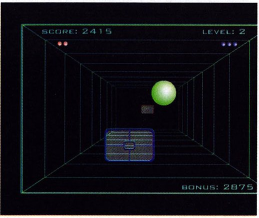
WARBEARS
URL: bit.ly/7zKbyv

A cutsey/violent point-and-clicker with lots of mission variety and a great art style.


Metaphysik: Ball Revamped II by John Cooney

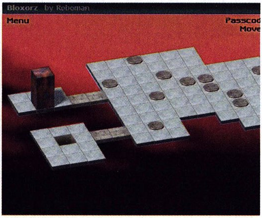
BALL REVAMPED II
URL: bit.ly/blDDio

As simple as it gets, but incredibly satisfying. Shame about the terrible name.


SCORE: 2415
LEVEL: 2
BONUS: 2875

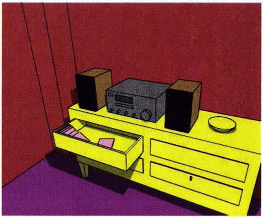
CURVEBALL
URL: bit.ly/11MOI

A *Pong* variant, but sometimes the simplest pleasures are the most satisfying.


Bloxorz by Roboman
Menu
Passcod
Move

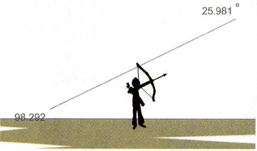
BLOXORZ
URL: bit.ly/2lqeWx

A great-looking, original puzzler. Plays better than a lot of PSP Minis.



CRIMSON ROOM
URL: bit.ly/3wHpQw

A creepy point-and-click from years ago. We won't spoil—just play it.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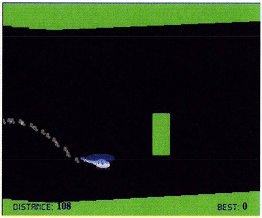
98.292

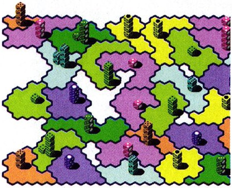
BOWMAN 2
URL: bit.ly/mJJpU

Great physics-based action. Pro Tip: Line up your shots from in front of the bowman.


DISTANCE: 108
BEST: 0

COPTER
URL: bit.ly/lrrk1

Copter goes up, Copter goes down. Not much to it, but it feels great to play.



DICE WARS
URL: bit.ly/1UHMfp

No hidden stats here; *Dice Wars* is simple strategy at its very best.

7

On Deck

Grind out a better world in *Shaun White Skateboarding*

The mantra is simple: skate to create our own twisted reality. But in *Shaun White Skateboarding* (yes, the beloved Olympic snowboarder skates too), it's not just about building the ultimate skate park. It's about saving the world.

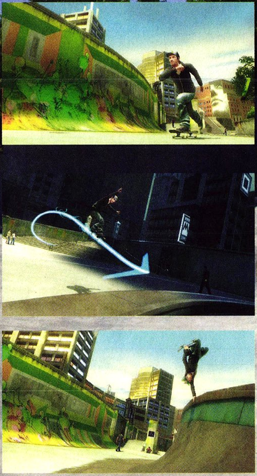
Borrowing a page from classics such as *Jet Grind Radio,* Shaun's latest game is set in an alternate world dominated by the all-controlling Ministry. Colorless and dull, Shaun's world can be transformed with the power of the grind. With a quick tap of the PS3 controller's Circle button, certain ledges can be morphed into quarter-pipes, and rails can be extended into twisty paths to new areas. Create the right route, then grind on a Ministry propaganda poster and it'll disappear. Make enough positive change and the entire city reacts, with Ministry buildings crumbling and re-forming into happy new structures.

Despite the fantastic setting, the skating itself is realistically grounded with a straightforward dual-control scheme. Beginners can tap the X button to perform basic tricks, but advanced players will likely gravitate to the right-analog stick, which can be flicked in various directions to mimic specific moves (with modifiers and manuals mapped to the R2 and L2 buttons).

With five distinct districts, 10 hours of gameplay, and hundreds of additional challenges to keep us engaged after beating the primary mission, *Skateboarding* might be our next skating obsession when it hits the rails this fall.

Photo: © Bryce Kanights/Red Bull Photofiles

Shaun White Skateboarding



8 Go Time

SCEA introduces new prices, bundles for PSP and PSPgo

At a time when everyone seems to be jumping into the handheld space, Sony wants to remind gamers that it still has the ultimate portable platforms. "The best gaming resides on PSP," says John Koller, SCEA's director of hardware marketing. "The platform is something we're very committed to. We're going to be in the handheld business for many, many years."

That commitment is showcased in a new marketing campaign that started in June, focusing on gaming over the PSP's other functionalities. But that's not all; SCEA also has a few other tricks up its sleeves.

$10 Games

Currently, new games retail for around $30, with Greatest Hits selling at around $20. SCEA recently launched a formal program of $9.99 "Favorites," including a fistful of first- and third-party titles from its deep catalog.

The goal is twofold: to attract a younger audience to the PSP-3000 (aka Slim), and to help combat piracy. In both cases, it's all about the impulse buy: just like the coveted tween gamer might have $10 in his pocket, so too might a potential pirate (who, ideally, would be willing to spend a sawbuck instead of stealing). Ideally, this will also help publishers protect the cash they sink into development by keeping their games on the shelves longer.

The initial lineup of $10 games includes:

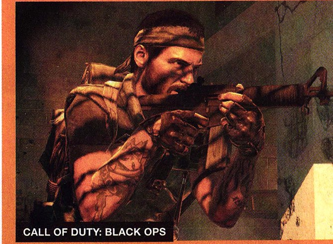
- *SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo*
- *Twisted Metal: Head-On*
- *Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee*
- *LocoRoco 2*
- *Patapon 2*
- *Silent Hill: Origins*
- *The Sims 2*
- *Manhunt 2*
- *Justice League Heroes*

PSPgo Digital Game Pack

Although the price of the hardware itself isn't dropping, SCEA hopes to entice gamers on the fence about a digital-only system by bundling the $250 PSPgo with $80 worth of vouchers for free games. According to Koller, consumers love the idea of an all-digital model, but they want to be educated on how to sign up for PSN and how to download the content. The vouchers, Koller suggests, will help ease gamers into the PSN ecosystem. "It smoothes out the educational process for us while providing a lot of value," he says.

The three free games now included with the PSPgo are:

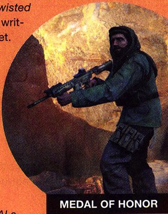
- *SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo 3*
- *LittleBigPlanet*
- *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters*



CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS

9 Readers' Most Wanted

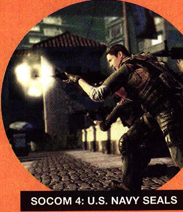
There's just no stopping *Call of Duty.* The recently announced *Black Ops* jumped straight to the top of this month's list of most anticipated PS3 games, surpassing EA's recently resurrected *Medal of Honor* franchise and platform stalwart *SOCOM* along the way. Maybe gamers have faith in *CoD: World at War* developer Treyarch after all? The real dark horse, however, is *Twisted Metal,* a game that, as of this writing, doesn't officially exist…yet. Here's hoping it'll be announced at this year's E3!



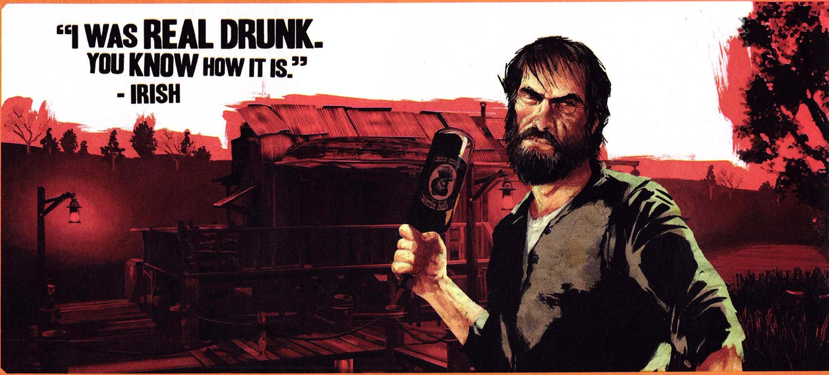
MEDAL OF HONOR

1. *Call of Duty: Black Ops*
2. *Gran Turismo 5*
3. *Madden NFL 11*
4. *Twisted Metal* PS3
5. *Rock Band 3*
6. *Medal of Honor*
7. *NBA Elite 11*
8. *The Sims 3*
9. *SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs*
10. *NCAA Football 11*
11. *Guitar Hero 6*
12. *Fallout: New Vegas*
13. *NHL 11*
14. *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed 2*
15. *Max Payne 3*
16. *Dead Space 2*
17. *F.E.A.R. 3*
18. *Transformers: War for Cybertron*
19. *Mafia II*
20. *LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars*

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of OTX Research. All games are PS3 titles scheduled to release after July 1, 2010. Polling period was May 10, 2010 to May 23, 2010.



SOCOM 4: U.S. NAVY SEALS

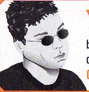

"I WAS REAL DRUNK.
YOU KNOW HOW IT IS."
- IRISH

A sure sign of inebriation: When you forget which end of the bottle is the drinkin' end.

10

Has Rockstar gone too far—again?

A conflicted Greg ponders ethnic insensitivity in *Red Dead Redemption*



YES
blubbers the delicate idealist
Greg Orlando

Any given 365-day period couldn't technically be called a year if Rockstar Games didn't infuriate someone. The game developer married controversy back in 2001 for *Grand Theft Auto III,* and the happy couple's offspring have trampled on sensibilities ever since.

With the Western-themed adventure *Red Dead Redemption,* there was some concern among the masses that maybe the ship had sailed, that in its vigilance to offend, Rockstar had offended *everyone* and was now out of assailable targets. How we wallowed in our naïveté in the manner of pigs amid the slop.

This time around, we have Irish, the town drunk. And if we venture into the Armadillo general store, there's a merchant who proclaims there's no Jew merchandise to be had here. Find him in Armadillo's saloon playing poker, and he'll gladly rattle off his theory about the Southern Railroad being a front for the Jews to run the country.

We might shake our heads and note this is just Rockstar being Rockstar. This is, after all, a cheap and easy way to garner some publicity. Rockstar pushes buttons, people respond in exasperation and anger, and controversy creates cash.

Except if we do this, we accept the notion of intolerance as an acceptable means for self-promotion and attention. Turning the debasement of human beings into a marketing stunt is an abhorrent thought, and here we are giving approval to this distasteful behavior because it's being done for the most insignificant of reasons.

Rockstar has shown, time and again, that the target doesn't matter, but rather the offense. It's not poking fun, or making a statement, or trying to challenge its audience. Its intolerance is nothing personal. Its intolerance is, ultimately, reprehensible.

NO
lectures the callous realist
Greg Orlando

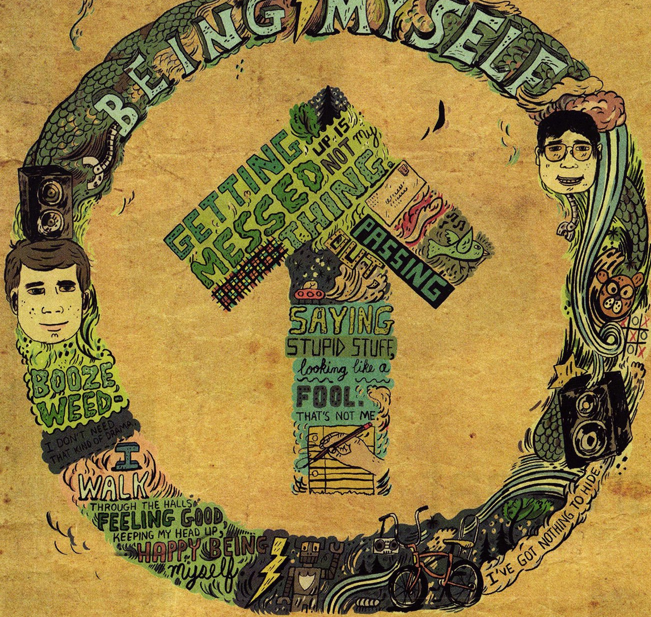
It is full well impossible to find fault with Greg Orlando's logic. Lesser men (and understand they are all lesser men) have tried and failed, many of them crushed beneath the meaty chunks of Orlando's logic.

Rockstar is clearly toying with its audience, and the popular media at large. It would be absurd to suggest a corporate monolith would advocate the murder of Haitians, gleefully mock the Irish, or push an anti-Semitic agenda. Clearly, the goal here is to shock and offend, with the bottom line being: Hey! It's not a crime to eat beluga caviar on a solid-gold cracker bought and paid for by sales of your videogame.

Yet in the context of *Red Dead Redemption*, there is some small, almost infinitesimally so, bit of historical relevancy. There was a tremendous groundswell of anti-Irish sentiment in America in the early 1900s. And it's not as if the anti-Semitic shopkeeper in the game appears out of the ether, either.

In its own clumsy, backhanded way, Rockstar has provided commentary on the American existence. It's not subtle, it's not clever, it's certainly not well done, but it does reflect a historical accuracy that we can't deny. More to the point, it reflects a historical accuracy we *should not* deny.

We cannot applaud Rockstar for attempting to attract attention by pushing stereotypes. But we can't throw a hissy fit every time someone says something we find distasteful. We've bought into the notion of political correctness because we honestly feel as if it's best to try to not hurt other people's feelings. But in doing so, we've created a monster, one that can't abide the slightest bit of insensitivity—or truth—regardless of the context.


BEING MYSELF
GETTING MESSED UP IS NOT MY THING.
PASSING OUT
SAYING STUPID STUFF, looking like a FOOL: THAT'S NOT ME
BOOZE WEED- I DON'T NEED THAT KIND OF DRAMA
I WALK THROUGH THE HALLS FEELING GOOD, KEEPING MY HEAD UP, HAPPY BEING myself
I'VE GOT NOTHING TO HIDE.

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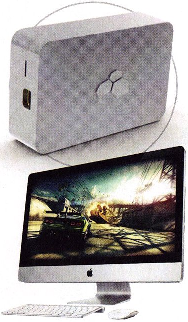
Office of National Drug Control Policy/Partnership for a Drug-Free America®

Want that

Lust-haves for PlayStation people



Kanex XD

Every time we glance at our 27-inch Apple iMac, we can't help but wish it were the center of our home entertainment world. Yearning fulfilled: the Kanex XD turns an iMac LED display into an HDTV, allowing us to connect our PS3 for sharp 720p gaming and movie viewing.

$150

Kanexlive.com

Kilowatt Cruiser

Now that cars are out and bikes are in, why not travel on two wheels in style? Power-assisted pedaling (courtesy of a 250 watt DC motor) means the Kilowatt Cruiser can hit speeds of up to 20 mph, with a range of 30 to 50 miles.

$2,415

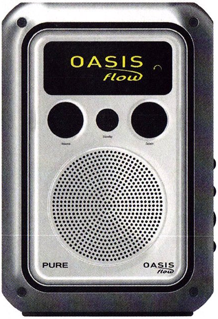
Kilowattbikes.com

Optoma GameTime projector

Need your big-screen HD gaming to go? Optoma's GT720 DLP projector weighs in under seven pounds and sports a 1280x800 native resolution and produces a screen image up to 300-inches in size. Handy backpack included.

$799

Optomausa.com



PURE Flow

Listening to Internet radio doesn't require a computer, as PURE's stylish Flow line deftly illustrates. A proprietary radio portal organizes favorite stations into shared folders and automatically synchronizes content across devices.

From $139

Pure.com

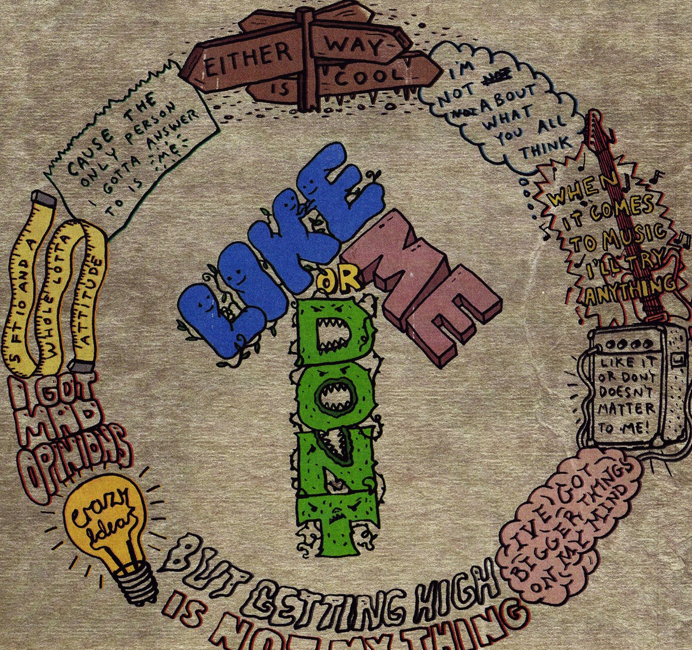
Bosch Power Box 360D

A beast of a boombox just in time for summer. With its 360-degree speakers, weather-sealed media player bay, powered USB port, and SD card slot, the 360D can handle most anything thrown at it. Literally.

$249

Boschtools.com

Prices and availability of products are correct as of press time.


LIKE ME OR DON'T
EITHER WAY IS COOL
I'M NOT ~~NOT~~ ~~NOT~~ ABOUT WHAT YOU ALL THINK
WHEN IT COMES TO MUSIC I'LL TRY ANYTHING
LIKE IT OR DON'T DOESN'T MATTER TO ME!
I'VE GOT BIGGER THINGS ON MY MIND
BUT GETTING HIGH IS NOT MY THING
crazy ideas
I GOT MAD OPINIONS
5 FT 10 AND A WHOLE LOTTA ATTITUDE
CAUSE THE ONLY PERSON I GOTTA ANSWER TO IS ME

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Office of National Drug Control Policy/Partnership for a Drug-Free America®

Blu-ray Central

Blu-ray Disc
HEATH LEDGER
CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER
WITH
JOHNNY DEPP
JUDE LAW
AND
COLIN FARRELL
A FILM BY TERRY GILLIAM
THE IMAGINARIUM OF DOCTOR PARNASSUS
2 ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATIONS 2009
ART DIRECTION · COSTUME DESIGN

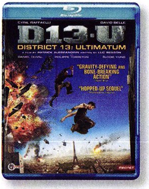
The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

+ Director Terry Gilliam has always marched to his own bizarre, often incomprehensible beat, but for fans, that's part of the joy in watching his work. If you loved his unofficial trilogy of *Time Bandits, Brazil,* and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen,* then *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* will fit happily into your collection. If the first three films were about the themes of childhood, adulthood, and old age, then this one is about dreams and death. Sadly, it's also the last film in which Heath Ledger ever starred.

The plot concerns the traveling show of the good doctor (played pitch-perfect by Christopher Plummer), as he tries to continually outwit the devil throughout a thousand-year life. Ledger is the wrench thrown into both their plans, as a mysterious amnesiac drifter who is clearly not what he seems. The movie is full of wistful, bizarre, dream-like—though clearly computer-generated—landscapes for its many set pieces, and the all-star cast of Ledger's fill-ins (Johnny Depp, Jude Law, and Colin Farrell)—necessitated by his death—fit right into the surreal story.

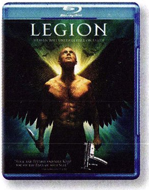
Like all of Gilliam's films, *Imaginarium* is an acquired taste that often seems like an exercise in style over substance. Nonetheless, the movie is colorful, entertaining, and whimsical, yet with a hefty dose of menace. Extras include the visionary director's interesting and insightful commentary, along with deleted scenes and behind-the-scenes featurettes.


Blu-ray Disc
CYRIL RAFFAELLI
DAVID BELLE
D13·U
DISTRICT 13: ULTIMATUM
"GRAVITY-DEFYING AND BONE-BREAKING ACTION"
"HOPPED-UP SEQUEL"
MAGNET

District 13: Ultimatum

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R

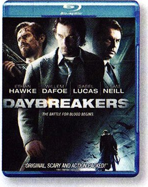
+ Anyone who thinks the French are a bunch of fleeing wussies clearly hasn't watched their action movies. *District B13* was a balls-out crazy, parkour buddy movie starring two of the baddass-est French guys since Jean Reno. *District 13: Ultimatum* is mostly more of the same and…well, who cares? It's a ton of fun, has amazing stunts, a mostly comprehensible plot, and opens with a fight scene starring the main character dressed in a disturbingly well-fitting stripper dress. The extras are rather dull, though the deleted scenes certainly suggest a director's cut wouldn't be out of line.


Blu-ray Disc
LEGION

Legion

PRICE: $29.98 **RATED:** R

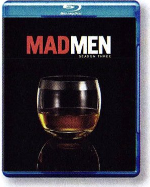
− We can only imagine that Paul Bettany saw Jude Law getting action roles and had to have one for himself. If only he'd been more selective. This ridiculously done mess should have at least been a guilty pleasure. Sadly, it's bogged down in boring exposition and dialogue; dark, cramped scenes; and a terrible script that steals from a bevy of similar movies in general, and the *Terminator* movies in particular. If nothing else, *Legion* looks and sounds terrific and does contain a few satisfyingly violent bits. There are picture-in-picture extras and such, but consider *Legion* a B movie for when your standards need a night off.


ETHAN HAWKE
WILLEM DAFOE
ISABEL LUCAS
SAM NEILL
DAYBREAKERS
THE BATTLE FOR BLOOD BEGINS
"ORIGINAL, SCARY AND ACTION-PACKED!"

Daybreakers

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

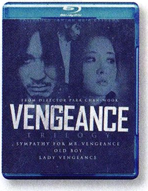
+ It would be far too easy to dismiss *Daybreakers* as throwaway crap made to cash in on the vampire craze, but that would be a real disservice to this surprising gem. Straight off, fans of sci-fi noir like *Dark City, Gattaca,* and *The Thirteenth Floor* will instantly feel at home with this moody, stylish, methodically framed tale of vampires taking over the world. Ethan Hawke, Sam Neill, and Willem Defoe are in fine form, and the Blu-ray transfer is terrific too. The commentary is excellent, and there's a feature-length documentary on the making of the film as well.


MADMEN
SEASON THREE

Mad Men Season 3

PRICE: $38.96 **RATED:** UNRATED

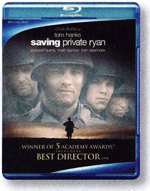
+ Season three of *Mad Men* continues to prove why this is simply one of the best shows on TV. Stylish, dark, and obsessively meticulous in its nostalgia, *Mad Men* works on every level that a good television show should. The characters are vividly real, the themes adult, and the subplots engaging and challenging. Moreover, the Blu-ray edition is simply stunning. Plenty of great extras—especially the beefy commentary tracks and a presentation that puts the AMC broadcasts to shame—make this an easy recommendation.


FROM DIRECTOR PARK CHAN-WOOK
VENGEANCE
TRILOGY
SYMPATHY FOR MR. VENGEANCE
OLD BOY
LADY VENGEANCE

Vengeance Trilogy

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** R

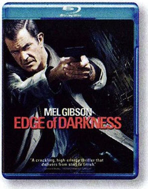
+ This terrifically done box set will enthrall fans of violent Asian cinema. Containing Korean director Park Chan-Wook's trilogy of revenge—*Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance, Old Boy,* and *Lady Vengeance*—this collection isn't for everyone, but fans will be well served and satisfied. The picture and sound quality are solid overall, though *Old Boy* is definitely the weakest looking of the bunch. There are a lot of extras spread over the course of the three movies as well, making it a perfect fan collectable.


tom hanks
saving private ryan
edward burns matt damon tom sizemore
WINNER OF 5 ACADEMY AWARDS
BEST DIRECTOR

Saving Private Ryan

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** PG

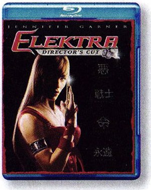
+ There isn't much left to say about the powerhouse of manly, war-movie drama that is *Saving Private Ryan,* but damn—Paramount went out of their way to make sure this wasn't some cheap and shoddy bone to throw at title-starved Blu-ray owners. The original DVD release was the benchmark for sound and video quality of its time, and this Blu-ray release is easily the same for the BD format. Room-shaking battles, a gorgeous picture, and a superb array of extras make this an easy must-buy.


MEL GIBSON
EDGE of DARKNESS
"A crackling, high-energy thriller that delivers from start to finish"

Edge of Darkness

PRICE: $24.95 **RATED:** PG

+ Mad Mel is back in this latest example of why you shouldn't make single fathers angry. The film is a gritty and engaging noir thriller, though slower paced than films like *Taken.* Gibson does his usual brooding, angry guy bits well and while the plot is far from bulletproof, there are enough action sequences and twists to keep the momentum up. The extras aren't great (though the short on the original 1985 BBC mini-series is interesting), but the presentation is excellent.


JENNIFER GARNER
ELEKTRA
DIRECTOR'S CUT

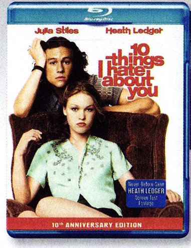
Elektra: Director's Cut

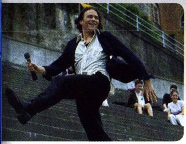
PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** UNRATED

− Taken as a true comic-book movie, *Elektra* is almost, but not quite, a complete bust. Jennifer Garner is easy on the eyes, but hardly the buxom, curvaceous, and exotic femme fatale from the comics, and the strictly PG-13 storyline is certainly sanitized to make Elektra seem likeable. While *Elektra* can't be categorized as a good movie, there's enough FX-frosted fun to make it a worthwhile viewing for B-grade kung-fu flick fans. There's also an extensive, though recycled, slew of extras.

Heath Ledger Retrospective

A high-definition tribute to one of the best actors of his generation—gone too soon

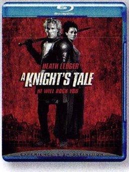

Julia Stiles
Heath Ledger
10 things I hate about you
Never-Before-Seen HEATH LEDGER Screen Test Footage
10th ANNIVERSARY EDITION



10 Things I Hate About You: 10th Anniversary Edition

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** PG-13

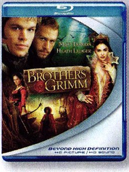
If you prefer to remember Heath Ledger as a young heartthrob, *10 Things* fits the bill. It's hard to go wrong with Shakespeare as your source material and this revamp of *The Taming of the Shrew* is still endearingly fun a decade after its theatrical release.


HEATH LEDGER
A KNIGHT'S TALE
HE WILL ROCK YOU

A Knight's Tale

PRICE: $28.95 **RATED:** PG-13

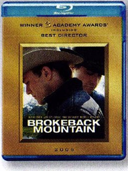
We're pretty sure no one in medieval England danced to Queen songs, but this fun, romantic adventure helped cement Ledger in the hearts of teenage girls everywhere.


MATT DAMON
HEATH LEDGER
BROTHERS GRIMM
BEYOND HIGH DEFINITION
HD PICTURE | HD SOUND

The Brothers Grimm

PRICE: $34.99 **RATED:** PG-13

Not one of Terry Gilliam's brightest moments, but great performances from Ledger and Damon (not to mention the ever-gorgeous Monica Bellucci) make it a worthwhile viewing.

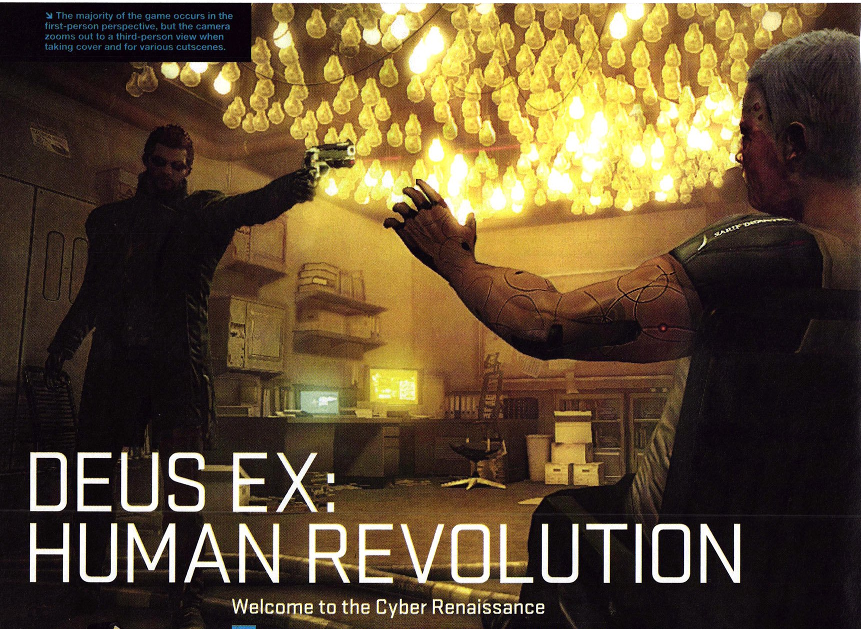

WINNER 3 ACADEMY AWARDS
INCLUDING
BEST DIRECTOR
BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN
2005

Brokeback Mountain

PRICE: $19.99 **RATED:** R

This isn't your usual cowboy movie. Show your love muffin that you have a sensitive side and watch this stirring tale of forbidden man love with her. After that, she just won't be able to quit you either.

Questions, comments, rants, raves about our Blu-ray reviews? Email Jason D'Aprile at **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**



The majority of the game occurs in the first-person perspective, but the camera zooms out to a third-person view when taking cover and for various cutscenes.

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

Welcome to the Cyber Renaissance

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Winter **GENRE:** Action RPG **PUBLISHER:** Square Enix **DEVELOPER:** Eidos Montreal

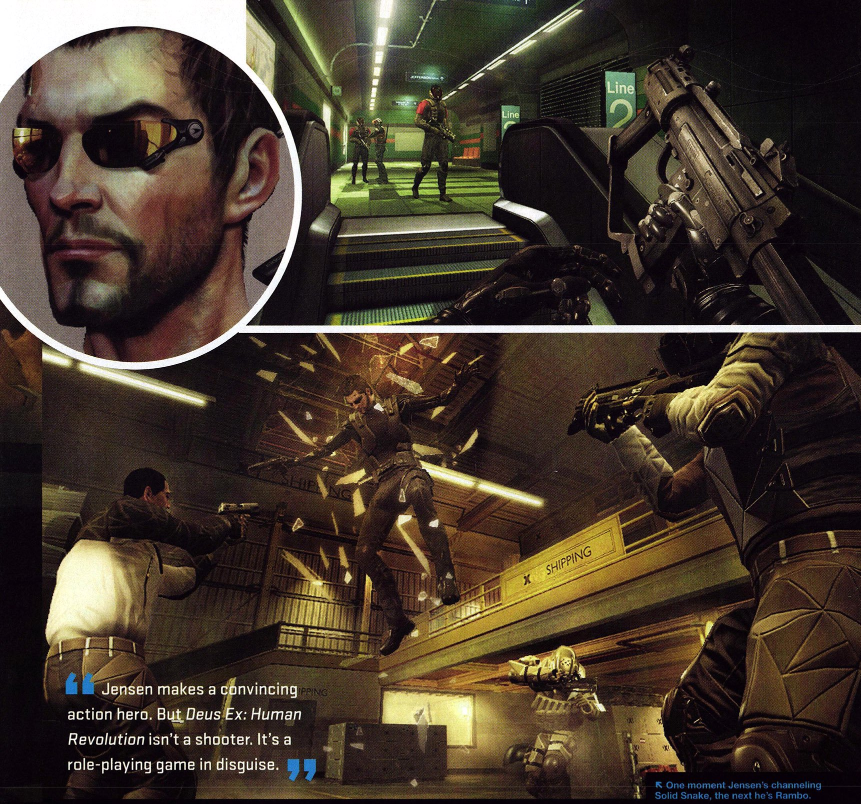
80-X BOXGUARD

It was over in a matter of seconds: Four men dead and they never saw it coming. Moments before, security specialist Adam Jensen stood above them, wrapped in darkness, absorbing their muffled conversation through the warehouse's glass ceiling. Then, amidst a torrent of falling shards, he struck the floor and emitted a burst of energy that left the guards stunned before he unleashed a barrage of miniature explosives from his sleek bionic arms. Of the five bodies strewn across the ground, only Jensen rose to his feet.

With shrieking alarms now providing the soundtrack to his bloody infiltration, Jensen engages his cloaking device and begins to move invisibly through the building, picking off his pursuers with chilling panache. He dives on two men from above, driving a pair of concealed blades into their spines. He punches through a brick wall and snaps an enemy's neck, having already detected the threat's location with his cybernetic eye. He equips a futuristic combat rifle and opens fire as he maneuvers expertly among various pieces of cover.

And then the cavalry arrives. A massive, *Metal Gear*-style mech crashes through the warehouse roof ready to begin its assault on Jensen. As it careens through the shipping crates and concrete barriers that once served as cover, Jensen dives for safety and counters with every ineffective bullet in his arsenal. But just as the situation starts to spin out of control, he stumbles upon his salvation: a pristine, unattended, heat-seeking rocket launcher…

Clearly, Jensen makes a convincing action hero. But *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* isn't a shooter. It's a role-playing game in disguise.



> “Jensen makes a convincing action hero. But *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* isn't a shooter. It's a role-playing game in disguise.”

↖ One moment Jensen's channeling Solid Snake, the next he's Rambo.

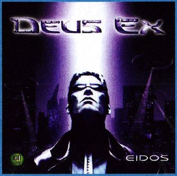
Choose Your Illusion

Despite the fact *Human Revolution* resembles a top-tier first-person shooter—with solid cover mechanics, punchy sound effects, and classic aiming and movement—there are several dramatically different ways to approach the game. So different in fact that it's possible to beat the campaign without killing anyone (well, outside of a cutscene at least). The experience will simply be shaped by each individual player's choices.

The game blends four distinct playstyles—combat, stealth, hacking, and social—to create what the developers refer to as hybrid gameplay, and as players progress, they'll be able to upgrade Jensen's cybernetic body with various augmentations that enhance his abilities in one or more of these areas. Remember the hidden blades, cloaking device, and cybernetic vision? They're all augmentations. By carefully selecting each upgrade, players will be able to define how they play the game and how the story unfolds.

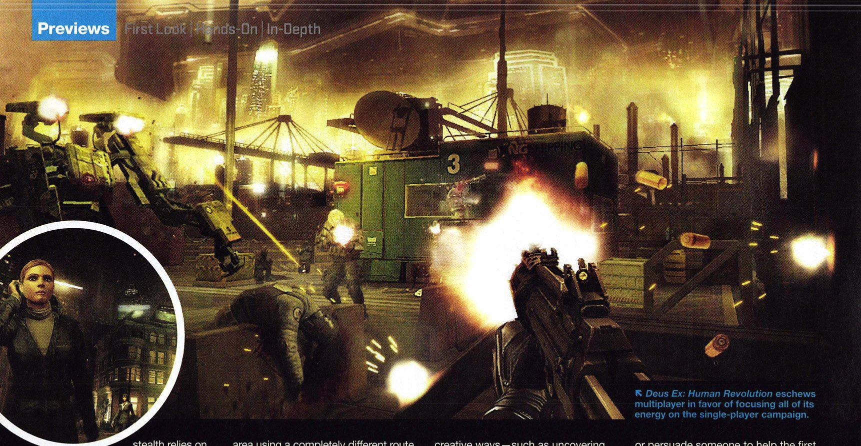
If Jensen had chosen a stealthy approach to the warehouse mission, for example, that brutal mech wouldn't have shown up. *Human Revolution's*

→ What's a Deus Ex?



The title might not contain a number, but *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is actually the third game in the *Deus Ex* series (though only the second to come to a PlayStation platform). The original game—which first launched in 2000 and was ported to the PS2 in 2002—is a celebrated PC classic often praised for its deeply immersive and intelligent design.

Revolution takes place nearly 25 years before the events of that game, so if you missed it, don't worry; the story and characters are largely unconnected. However, the development team told us they studied both of the original games extensively during the design process for *Revolution*, and their care can clearly be seen in the gritty but credible near-future world, which draws heavily upon the universe established in the game's predecessors.



↖ *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* eschews multiplayer in favor of focusing all of its energy on the single-player campaign.

stealth relies on breaking the line of sight and remaining silent, so had Jensen snuck in quietly through a skylight, performed a few undetected takedowns, and dragged the bodies out of sight (all of which we saw him do in a later mission) instead of crashing conspicuously through the ceiling, the mission might have concluded in an entirely different manner. The developers even told us that had Jensen possessed a particular strength augmentation, he could have moved a specific crate earlier on and snuck through the area using a completely different route.

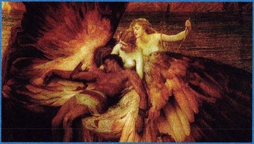
The hacking approach on the other hand offers subtlety but not necessarily safety. When equipped with the necessary augmentations, players can access and manipulate any security system using a hacking minigame—which, the devs warn us, forces players to be aware of their surroundings. At one point, we watched Jensen use his genius computer skills to deactivate some unfriendly robots and unlock a previously impassable door, but we wouldn't be surprised if hacking could also be used in more creative ways—such as uncovering encrypted information and using it to blackmail a key character.

But perhaps the most ambitious playstyle is the game's "social" aspect. Much like *Fallout 3, Revolution* features extensive character interaction complete with branching dialogue trees. Unlike *Fallout 3,* however, these conversations play out almost like *Heavy Rain*-style cutscenes, with fluid, cinematic action rather than a static view of someone's face. Also, characters react dynamically to Jensen's behavior: If he fails to gain information or persuade someone to help the first time around, non-playable characters won't just repeat the same lines if they're spoken to again. They might even mock Jensen or tell him to stop bothering them.

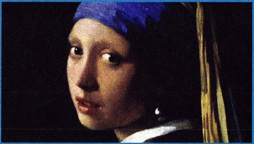
Not only will these interactions provide a means through certain missions and help drive the main narrative, they can also flesh out the backstory or even lead to side missions. The size and openness of the game's various locations—which span the globe from Detroit to Shanghai—fall "somewhere between *BioShock 2* and *Fallout 3"*

↘ Influential

Deus Ex: Human Revolution draws on a long and proud history of cultural masterpieces to create its unique take on classic cyberpunk themes. Here are just a few sources we suspect inspired the team at Eidos Montreal.



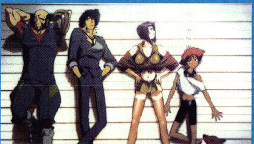
GREEK MYTHOLOGY



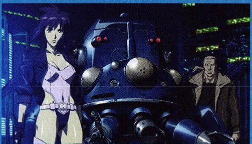
THE EUROPEAN RENAISSANCE

CLASSIC NOIR

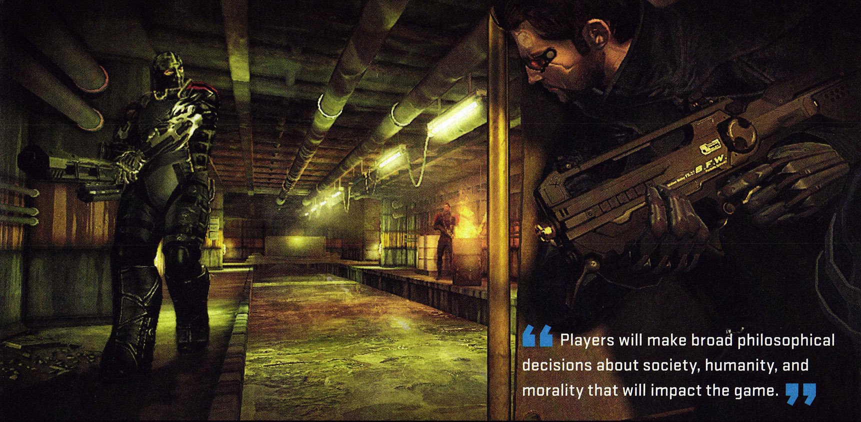
BLADE RUNNER



COWBOY BEBOP



GHOST IN THE SHELL



> Players will make broad philosophical decisions about society, humanity, and morality that will impact the game.

according to the developers, and each one is filled with non-playable characters ready to chat us up. And while some will obviously be more helpful than others, the devs promise no one will repeatedly spout meaningless one-liners and characters will always react realistically to players' actions. Point a pistol at a civilian, for instance, and he'll surrender in fear.

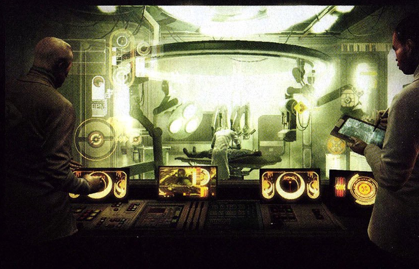
Ghost in the Machine

The game's semi-open-world structure also allows for a nonlinear approach to missions and objectives. Since each map features several different areas and points of entry, there are often multiple paths and solutions that can be uncovered through exploration. Combined with the ability to mix and match augmentations to create a unique playstyle, players will almost never be forced to do things in a particular way. Instead, the development team wants to emphasize the idea of "choice and consequences"—a design philosophy that carries over into the narrative space.

↙ Futuristic fashions are influenced by the Renaissance era.

By the year 2027, humanity has reached a turning point. The world has entered a "Cyber Renaissance" during which technology evolves at an alarming rate and the line between man and machine begins to blur as cybernetic enhancements become increasingly common. But these advances come at a cost. A hardened social divide begins to emerge as the underprivileged are left without access to this life changing technology, and concerns over its long-term biological implications rapidly grow. Tension, discrimination, and eventually chaos erupt across the globe over this brazen attempt to alter the very definition of humanity.

In the midst of it all stands Jensen, a mysterious man with a checkered past who recently found work as a security officer at a multinational corporation specializing in cybernetic technology. His task? Protect a group of researchers who could potentially make mechanical augmentation cheaper and more accessible for everyone. Though he's flesh-and-blood at the beginning of the game, he's forced to accept a bionic body when his clients are attacked by an unknown group of heavily augmented mercenaries and he's left near death. Now, he must discover the truth behind the attack and unravel the vast conspiracies underneath. The future of human evolution is at stake.

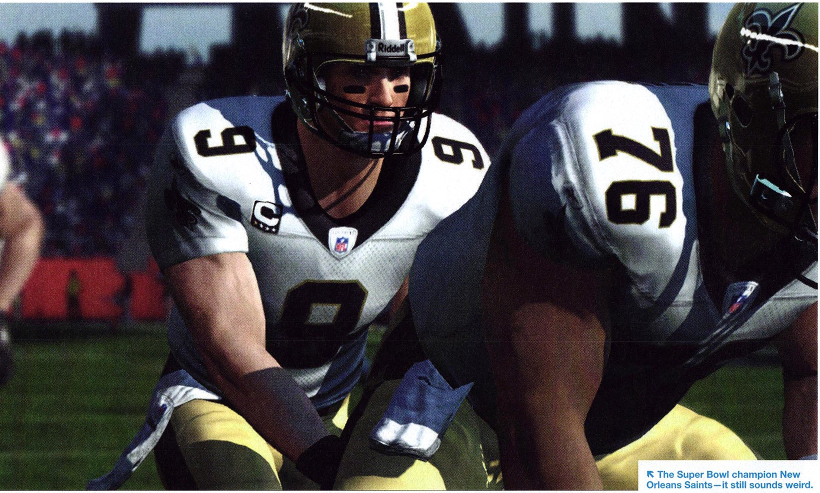


↗ In addition to upgrading Adam Jensen with augmentations, players will collect experience points that contribute to character progression "in a unique way."

Blood and Oil

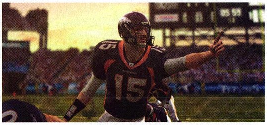
That's where "choice and consequences" come in. According to the developers, players will make broad philosophical decisions about society, humanity, and morality, as well as smaller, more immediate decisions that will more directly impact the game. If players choose to a kill a character early on, for example, they might not feel the repercussions until hours later. The game doesn't contain any kind of karma system, but the story does have multiple endings, meaning players' actions will have significant overall impact. Despite the multiple endings, however, the central narrative still follows a linear path—though, like *Fallout 3,* the story branches between the major plot points depending on what portions of the game a player chooses to explore.

Regardless of where players travel though, they'll experience a deep, gritty cyberpunk universe combining the coolest parts of sci-fi and classic noir—not to mention a few Baroque flourishes for a little visual flavor. We found it totally mesmerizing, and while we'll reserve judgment of this dauntingly ambitious project until we've actually played it, *Revolution* has definitely become one of our "games to watch" in 2010. | Scott Butterworth



↖ The Super Bowl champion New Orleans Saints—it still sounds weird.

MADDEN NFL 11



Time to stock up on the Turducken

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** August **GENRE:** Sports **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports **DEVELOPER:** EA Tiburon

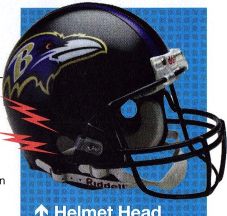
There are two kinds of people in this world—those who are obsessed with *Madden,* and those who haven't played *Madden* yet. Some 20 years into the series, the divide is fairly well-defined. The trick for the developers at EA Sports is to find ways to get people from that second category into the first, without alienating the die-hard fans that made the *Madden* franchise what it is today. Easy enough. But how to do it?

If there's an underlying theme to *Madden NFL 11,* it's "simpler, deeper." The goal is to keep in all the dizzying attention to detail attracting the armchair quarterbacks and couch coaches, but allow the more casual football fan to play the game without needing an advanced degree in Erhardt-Perkins (which, for the record, is an NFL offense, not a Park Avenue law firm).

The most significant feature addition is the GameFlow option, which frees the player from having to select among a dizzying array of plays (350 or so) before every down. Each team has a ready-made playbook with defaults set as close to the actual team's offense as possible. It's all customizable, of course—the full playbook is still accessible for the would-be Belichicks, and audible options remain in place—but it's entirely possible to leave the play-calling up to the virtual "coach" and just play the game. This means a game can be finished in a manageable 20 minutes instead of the usual hour, with more time spent breaking tackles and throwing passes than debating between the Singleback Double Flex and the I-Form Slot Flex. Huh? Exactly. Sometimes checkers can be more fun than chess.

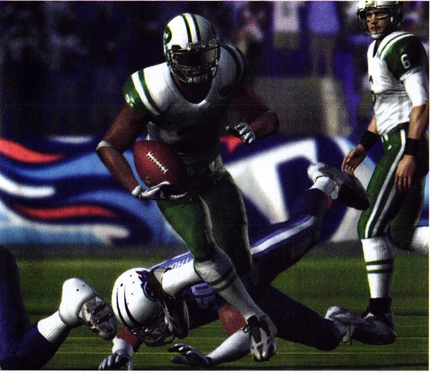
Tweaking the Game Plan

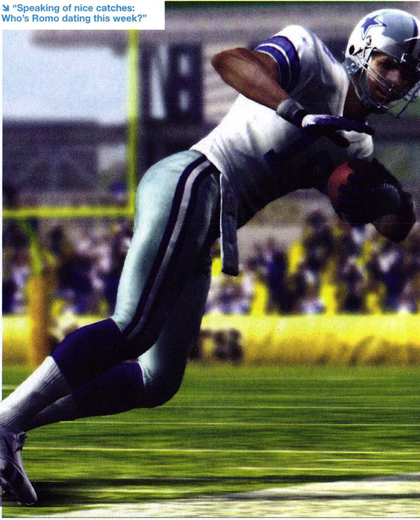
Player movement will be more realistic this year, with locomotion taken from the more advanced *FIFA Soccer* system, and separate upper-body control added to the right-analog stick (it's best not to get too carried away, the developers warn, or virtual Adrian Peterson might fall flat on his face without anyone touching him). Through judicious use, it's possible to high-step or lean forward to avoid would-be tacklers or gain extra yardage. In what may be disheartening news to some, however, developer EA Tiburon has done away with turbo boosts, which means receivers and runners have their speed limited by their ratings. Agility and quickness off the line can be as important—or *more* important—than the more generic "speed." But an added touch of realism can never hurt.



↑ Helmet Head

The best part of GameFlow is the faux-Motorola (Fauxtorola?) headset that delivers play suggestions directly into a Bluetooth earpiece. The plays also appear on the screen, but the headset is way more fun. The only thing is, if you're going to act more like the quarterback why not offer a full-on replica Riddell helmet with a built-in earpiece? Maybe EA Sports is saving that for *Madden NFL 12.*





➘ "Speaking of nice catches: Who's Romo dating this week?"

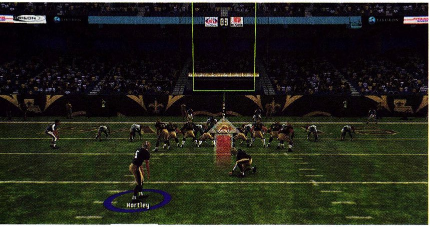
More welcome is that the once-vexing kicking system has been revamped, with a more intuitive and simple sliding two-stage kick meter (power, then accuracy) like that used for putts or free throws in other EA Sports titles. No longer will a 20-yard field goal be the videogame equivalent of tossing a Life Saver over a toothpick. That change alone should save countless controllers from the ever-popular "wide right to smash."

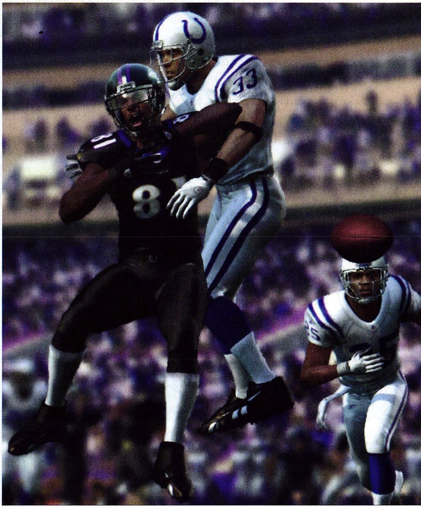
More Show

Aside from the gameplay, additional attention has been paid to the presentation and visuals—the background screens and load screens are all properly NFL themed, with actual photos and real camera settings. The players themselves are more detailed and realistic looking, even with their helmets off, and even the crowd is less of a generic clone army (although not entirely populated with unique individuals). The programmers also occupied themselves with more festive upgrades, such as celebrations, which promise to be more over the top, particularly for the Super Bowl.

Then there's the AFL option (which was available as a download pack for *Madden 10),* which should appeal to both older fans and those who prefer the *NFL Films* NFL to today's game. Stocked with all the old teams and presented in grainy "film," AFL lets us play out grudge matches or, perhaps, enjoy the Boston Patriots battering the Houston Oilers in the snow.

The bottom line is this: *Madden 11* is like a sports car with one of those manu-matic transmissions. Those interested in the full driving experience can shift gears and live out their Formula 1 fantasies every time they get behind the wheel. But at the same time, it's entirely possible to turn the key and mash the gas and just drive fast without worrying about the details. *Madden 11* can be brain-meltingly complex or arcade simple. Just know that either way, it's still *Madden.* | Russ Bengtson



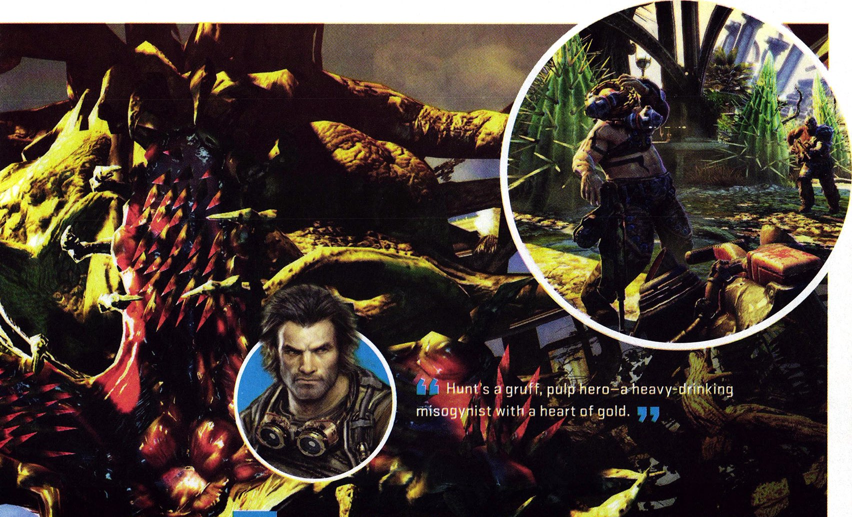


HEADSHOT +50

BULLETSTORM

The forecast calls for heavy melee, with a smattering of human guts

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD 2011 GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: People Can Fly / Epic Games



> Hunt's a gruff, pulp hero—a heavy-drinking misogynist with a heart of gold.

Grayson Hunt isn't the kind of man to let an old grudge easily die. He's a gruff, pulp hero—a heavy-drinking misogynist with a heart of gold that's incredibly well buried. He was fired from his job as an elite assassin after refusing to pull the trigger on an innocent, and was unfairly forced into a life of piratical exile when his boss, the charismatic and villainous General Sarrano, declared him a traitor to the Confederation. So, when Hunt discovers the warbird of his old, hated employer 10 years later, he naturally steers his own ship into its engines. Hey, we've all done stuff when we're drunk, right?

Danger Zone

Both crafts are disabled and launch escape pods onto the nearby planet of Stygia. This turns out to be a mysterious and lethal place—a place, like *Avatar's* Pandora, where the local flora can poison and devour us, or *BioShock's* Rapture, a once idyllic Utopia that's fallen to some mysterious epidemic. It's also a place where we'll find an extensive range of ridiculous but creative weaponry.

That's because *Bulletstorm* is all about killing with style. Developer People Can Fly isn't content to let us hide behind cover and pick off a couple of distant pixels with a sniper rifle. So, the team has removed the cover mechanism that its mammoth backers, Epic Games, virtually invented in the Xbox 360-exclusive *Gears of War*—the cover system that's since become a shooter standard.

Instead, the devs have seriously upgraded the melee combat, and are encouraging us to use it. The kick attack doesn't just send a victim sprawling—it does so in slow motion, giving us a chance to execute a better-scoring headshot. And if there's no one in range, we can fix that with a flick of our energy whip, or thrust ourselves into the action using a jet-powered slide.

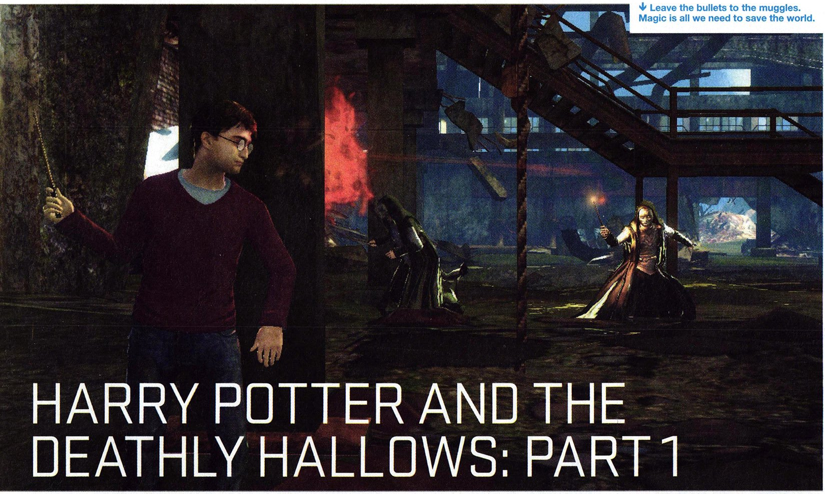
Thrill Kills

Along with the environmental hazards and the ridiculous weapons, *Bulletstorm* offers a huge scope for creative mayhem. On a very basic level, headshots can be chained together, or enemies can be kicked into cacti or decapitated with bolas. But even that's not getting into the spirit of the game. We can, if we like, bring structures down on people, or have the aggressive and unfussy plants chow down on the feral gang members, or attach grenades to a guy and then kick him into a crowd.

At the more disturbing end of the game's special moves, there's "Mercy." This involves putting a bullet in the head of a man who we may have—accidentally, of course—just shot in the genitals. Then there's "Boy Toy"—which involves the above, but also with some meaty lashes from our energy whip.

The points we earn from our stylish kills can be spent on upgrades, such as the Peacemaker Carbine's ability to fire a hundred bullets at once. Or the energy whip's Thumper attack, which explodes an area of ground, sending everyone flying in slow motion. While they're hanging around up there, we can either pick them off with our gun for a basic (read: disappointing) kill, or set off some explosives for a combo kill that's 10 times more profitable.

Bulletstorm doesn't do anything to calm the debate about virtual violence, but to anyone with a fraction of a brain, it's big, brash, dumb fun. And besides, anything that encourages us to kick someone into a carnivorous plant instead of lazily shooting him with another gun… well, that's got to be good for the imagination, hasn't it? | James Coates



↓ Leave the bullets to the muggles. Magic is all we need to save the world.

HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS: PART 1

Wands of war

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Shooter **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** Bright Light Studios

It only makes sense: As young Mr. Harry Potter grows up, so too shall his videogame.

That's the goal with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I,* the first Harry Potter game to take our fledgling wizard out of the hallowed (and sheltered) halls of Hogwarts and thrust him into a cold, cruel world where life can be snuffed out with a flick of a wand. No more teachers, no more books, but plenty of evil, nasty looks.

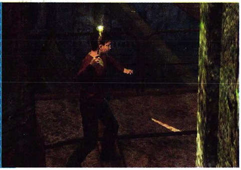
Our demo began in a disused power station, complete with boxes and barrels and bits of aluminum siding to hide behind. Almost immediately, we can see how the game has changed. Potter ducks behind cover when he spots a band of scruffy snatchers, the lowest level of the evil Lord Voldemort's henchmen. Here, a Stupefy spell does the trick. A few quick rat-a-tat-tat blasts and we've cleared away this initial area, the snatchers disappearing in clouds of black smoke. "We've come a long way from cleaning windows with magic," our host says with a smile.

Later, we run into a larger group that includes a few higher-level death eaters. This time, we plan our actions. First, it's time to hurl a Confundo enchantment—which we use to set one death eater against the others, helping thin the ranks. We're spotted, so we take cover, but that cover is quickly blasted away. We pull up a radial menu and switch to Crucio, a curse that feels more like a submachine gun compared with Stupefy's semi-automatic pistol. The weapon analogy holds true for the other spells as well: Confringo is like a rocket launcher, with Potter dropping to one knee and slowly taking his shot; Expelliarmus is the sniper rifle, a one-shot kill that must be charged. Also in our arsenal: Leviosa, which can be used to levitate inanimate objects to use as cover or as an offensive weapon. Strategy is key to survival here, choosing not just the right weapons but also targeting the squad leader first in order to make it easier to blast away at the rank and file.

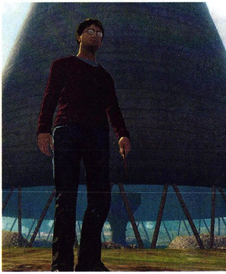
Combat is the focus in this game aimed at older teens, but we're told exploration and collection will also play a part. Just remember: Nowhere is safe now that Lord Voldemort is back in action. Wands up! | Gary Steinman

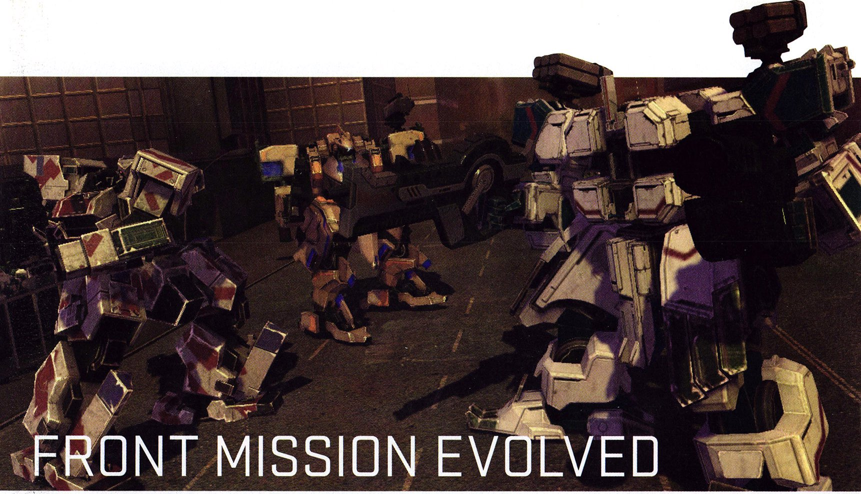
→ What's New for Part 2?

Though the developers were shy about revealing details for the second chapter, they did indicate that we should expect something completely different. If it's as surprising as the shooter-ific rethinking of the *Harry Potter* game franchise for *Part 1,* we're definitely intrigued.



↑ Fair warning: In *Deathly Hallows,* the death eaters don't need to play by school rules.





FRONT MISSION EVOLVED

Because everyone wants to pilot a giant robot

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Double Helix Games

Credit Square Enix for knowing its strengths: *We're good at storytelling. Action shooters? Not so much.*

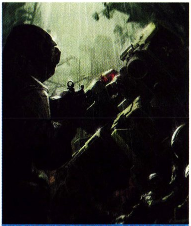
We're paraphrasing a representative from Square, who's explaining why the Japanese publisher handed over the development of this longtime turn-based strategy RPG franchise to German code shop Double Helix. Under the close direction of Square's Shinji Hashimoto *(Front Mission, Kingdom Hearts)*, Double Helix will be putting us directly into the cockpit of our very own wanzer—that's "giant robot" to the rest of us—in a more Western-friendly third-person shooter. Set 50 years after the events of *Front Mission 5, Evolved* stars Dylan Ramsey, an engineer developing prototype wanzers who gets swept up into a heated series of battles after New York's orbital elevator is destroyed in a terrorist attack.

But that's all just background. In our exclusive hands-on demo, we took Ramsey's prototype Zephyr for a spin, and in our eagerness to test the transition to pure action, we skipped the chat-heavy cutscenes to jump right into the fray. What we found? The unique mixture of lumbering destruction and nimble maneuvers that's typical of mech-based shooters. When walking, the Zephyr seems to move too slowly—but one push in of the controller's left-analog stick and we're suddenly boost-gliding through the dense urban corridors. Of course, boosting only lasts so long, so it's essential to ease off the throttle now and then.

During the game's intense firefights, we had the option of using powerful shoulder-mounted missiles or rapid-fire machine guns set on either arm. We could also boost forward, smashing our robot foes with a steely backhand.

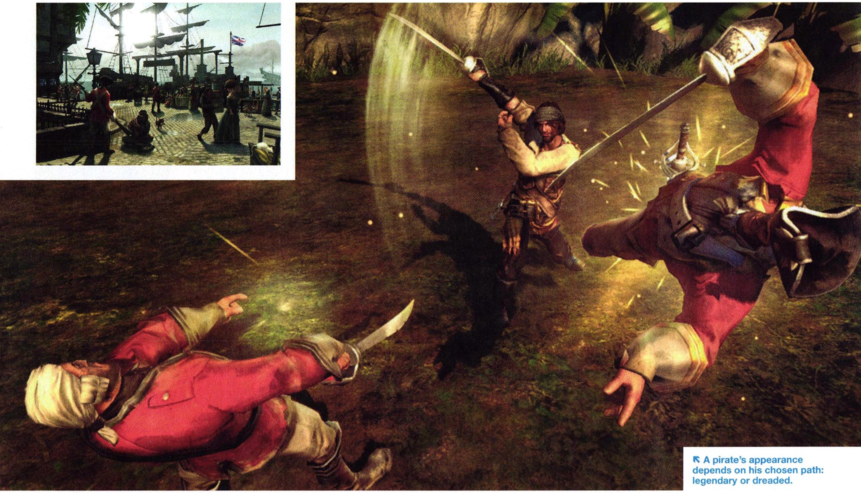
Before each mission, we also had the option to fully customize our wanzer. That's the strategy portion of *Evolved.* Let's say we're facing a single, overpowered menace: We can go nimble with a sniper rifle and shoot from a safe distance, or heavy with shields and rush forward for close-quarters combat. The choice is ours, but Square fully expects us to try different options before settling on our preferred play style. We're expecting that'll lead to a lot of different wanzer setups during the 12-hour solo campaign and in the half-dozen unannounced multiplayer modes. | Gary Steinman

↙ All the CG cutscenes are being rendered by Square's Visual Works studio.



↑ EDGE of Control

Don't worry about *Front Mission's* story becoming too "westernized"—the script is being penned by *Final Fantasy XIII's* Motomu Toriyama. Take the Zephyr's special mode—called EDGE, which is an acronym for Emergency Defense Galvanosynaptic Enhancer. Sure, it slows down time and highlights foes for easier dispatching…but that acronym! It's classic Square stuff.



↖ A pirate's appearance depends on his chosen path: legendary or dreaded.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: ARMADA OF THE DAMNED

Disney's famous ride sets sail for PS3

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Spring 2011 **GENRE:** Action RPG **PUBLISHER:** Disney Int. Studios **DEVELOPER:** Propaganda Games

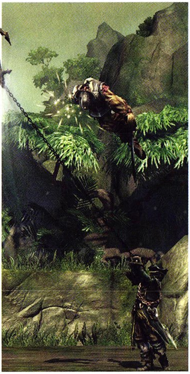
It's tough to argue with dollars, especially when we're talking about 2.6 billion of them. That's the worldwide theatrical gross of Disney's three *Pirates of the Caribbean* films, and now the franchise—which was originally based on a *theme park ride*—is pushing its way into videogames. But don't worry: This isn't just a quick attempt to cash in on a hot property. Instead, Disney is set to deliver a robust action role-playing game that's being developed by their wholly owned subsidiary Propaganda Games, an up-and-coming studio run by BioWare veteran Dan Tudge.

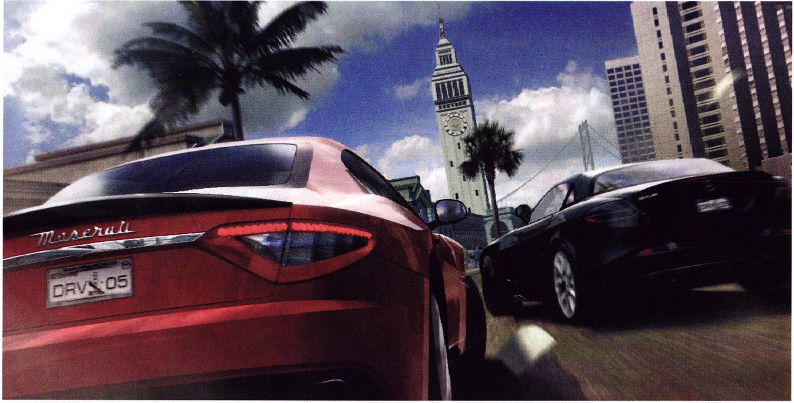
In *Pirates of the Caribbean: Armada of the Damned,* we play as a young pirate embarking on his maiden voyage in a sprawling adventure set before the films. The game will be chockablock with choices that we're told will reverberate through the game, although the primary one is decided at the start: Will we be legendary (showy, swashbuckling, but ultimately decent-hearted) or dreaded (fearful and foreboding)? Depending on that initial decision, our pirate will change his appearance and his weapons, and characters will react differently throughout our adventure.

Along the way of fulfilling our ultimate goal, we'll become captains of our own ship, an upgradable vessel the developers are hoping we'll care about as much as our player character. Recruiting and managing a crew will certainly help build that bond.

Though we've yet to see the ship gameplay, we took our pirate onto land to test out the combat—a satisfying mix of light and heavy attacks, along with magic and special moves, all handy for dispatching the hordes of zombified islanders blocking our path. We first played the level as a legendary pirate: a lighter, snappier character who used his sword to nimbly slice and dice his foes. Later, we returned to the same isle as a dreaded pirate: a scarred, scrappy brawler who heaved around a massive anchor for his heavy attacks. Though the gameplay was similar, the look and feel of the two were different enough, and the dialogue choices were likewise dissimilar. Whether or not these changes truly warrant multiple playthroughs, we're not yet sure—but the wry chatter was already entertaining enough to suggest we'd be more than amused on a second visit, just to see the way the story plays out. | Gary Steinman

↓ Dreaded pirates can sweep away their foes with a heavy anchor and chain.





↖ Two cars race toward San Francisco's iconic Embarcadero Ferry building.

DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO

Back in gear

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Reflections

When Martin Edmondson tells us *"Driver* is back," we listen.

We listen because Edmondson—the creative director at Ubisoft Reflections and the man behind the *Driver* franchise when it was good (and, alas, when it was not so good)—knows how to make an open-world driving adventure. And we listen because, even based on our limited sneak peek, *Driver: San Francisco* already seems to be gunning toward greatness.

For starters, there's the setting: "The most iconic car chase city of all time," Edmondson smiles. Then, we have the characters. Tanner, the undercover cop from the first game, is once again the star. His partner, Tobias Jones, also returns. Jericho, the arch nemesis from *Driver 2*—and the man who shot Tanner at the end of *Driv3r*—is also around. *San Francisco* skips past the fourth game, *Parallel Lines,* and picks up shortly after *Driv3r,* right when Jericho is being sentenced.

Finally, there's the gameplay, which aims to deliver the most authentic Hollywood-style car chases ever seen in a videogame. "That's the thing we do," Edmondson says, "and we brought that back too."

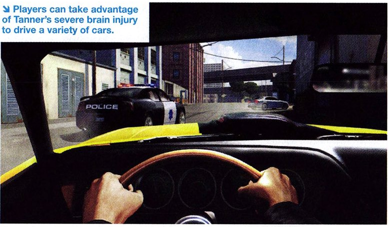
So what's new? Licensed cars, for one. Or make that more than 100, from all different eras. In just a few minutes we spotted a 1970 Dodge Challenger R/T, a Maserati GranTurismo, a DeLorean, and an Aston Martin. The second change, though, is even more intriguing: Tanner now has the ability to "shift" from one car to another at will.

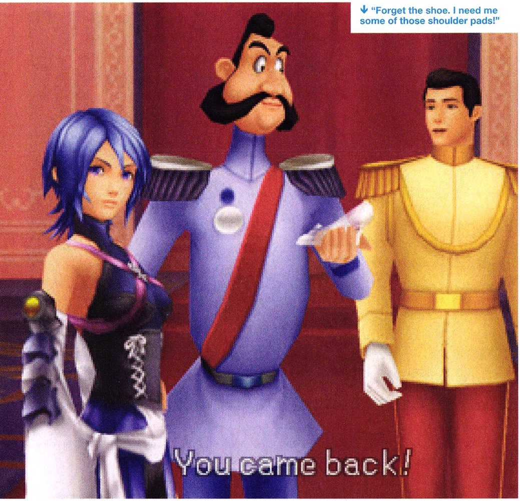
The idea here is that Tanner had a near-death experience and he thinks he's gained a strange ability, but *we* know better. We all realize Tanner is actually comatose—and that plays a key role in the story.

While we help Tanner uncover the mystery behind his current status, we can, with the tap of a button, shift from car to car. Each car has a different character in it, and many of these characters have their own missions. As an example, Edmondson shifts into a police car chasing a Mustang. He's now the cop, but he has trouble catching the car, so he shifts again, scrolls ahead, finds an 18-wheeler, and uses it to take out the Mustang with one sideswipe. "It's about choosing the right tools for the job," he says.

The possibilities are tantalizing, especially when Edmondson points out a car transporter and refers to it as a "roving ramp." | Gary Steinman

↘ Players can take advantage of Tanner's severe brain injury to drive a variety of cars.

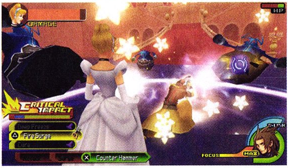


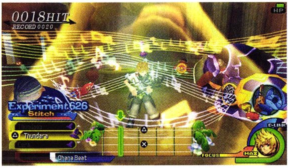


↓ "Forget the shoe. I need me some of those shoulder pads!"

Come on now. Zugk-zugk.

↓ Cinderella won't be the only Disney princess in *Sleep*.





KINGDOM HEARTS: BIRTH BY SLEEP

Have keyblade, will travel

PSP AVAILABLE: September GENRE: Action RPG PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Square Enix

There's never been a mix quite like *Kingdom Hearts:* the feel of a *Final Fantasy* role-playing game, the gameplay of an action platformer, and a heaping helping of all the cutest, most revered Disney properties blended into a franchise we've come to adore. And now, with *Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep,* the franchise is about to deliver one of the best-looking games for the PSP yet.

The story takes place 10 years before the original *Kingdom Hearts.* Our three main characters—Ventus, Terra, and Aqua—are all in training to become keyblade masters, but their lessons are cut short when they're sent across the universe in search of a missing keyblade master named Xehanort.

In our recent playtest, we took control of Terra, a tall, strong character charged by his master to protect the Disney worlds from the new foe, the Unversed, en route to finding Xehanort. Our mission was set in Cinderella's world, in which we leapt into battle to defend the princess from the Unversed.

The controls allow for flashy and frenetic battles, a staple of the *Kingdom Hearts* series. As wave after wave of enemies appeared, we held down both the left- and right-shoulder buttons and swept a targeting reticule across a horde of small enemies, prompting Terra to dash across the screen running each enemy through with brutal speed.

When we ran low on health, we used the new dimension-link function to summon different characters we'd befriended over the game, at first to cast a healing spell and later to access different fighting styles.

Toward the end of our time in Cinderella's world we were confronted with a giant dancing Unversed. The design and detail reminded us of our favorite PS2 *Kingdom Hearts* battles as we dispatched him with a flurry of fiery in-air combos.

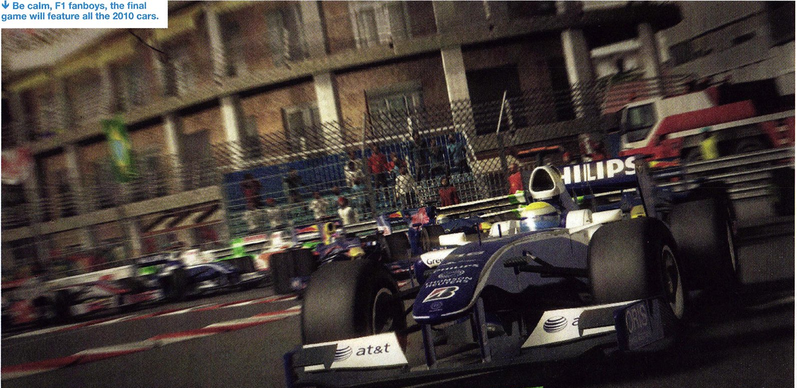
The main characters each have their own story arcs, and the entire story is only revealed after playing through all three. Even though we only experienced one single-player scenario, we're looking forward to *Sleep,* which already seems like the first true sequel to the beloved PS2 classics. | David Murphy

↙ The Name Game

Ventus, Terra, and Aqua – Latin for wind, earth, and water. Likewise, the first game's Sora, Riku, and Kairi can be interpreted in Japanese as sky, ground, and sea.

Xehanort – An anagram for "no heart" with an "x" in it. Many characters in the series have anagrammed names, including all 14 members of organization XIII.

Eraqus – The name of the heroes' master is an anagram for "Square," and he looks just like Hironobu Sakaguchi, *Final Fantasy's* creator.



↓ Be calm, F1 fanboys, the final game will feature all the 2010 cars.

F1 2010

What the rest of the world is driving

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** September **GENRE:** Racing Sim **PUBLISHER:** Codemasters **DEVELOPER:** Codemasters

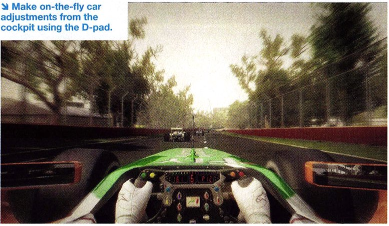
Real-world driving affords the luxury that is time. There's ample opportunity to check the hair in the mirror, place a call, send that text (confession is good for the soul), take a bite of the burger and a swig of soda… "Hey, the new Mitsubishis are in early this year!" And *then* swing a right turn.

Taking a bender in Formula 1, if our stint in *F1 2010's* driver seat is any indication, is a far less protracted affair. Hit 200 mph, gauge competitors' position, select optimum line, brake, *brake, BRAKE!!!* …Miss the turn and run off the track.

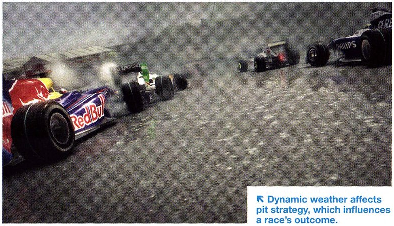
It's a lesson imparted but not really learned as the scenario repeated itself frequently over the next several laps. Everything happened faster here—success in the 12-team, 24-driver field required razor-quick, yet precise inputs of throttle, brake, and steering. Mistakes and sloppy technique was never rewarded; aspiring drivers should plan on analyzing and memorizing the 19 authentic track layouts if they hope to be competitive.

There's no doubting *F1 2010* is a simulation game, but an impressive level of scalability keeps the game accessible to casual racing fans while still satisfying the hardest-of-the-hardcore Formula 1 fanatic. Players can set up a five-lap (one pit-stop mandatory) quick race for a taste of speed, or wend through the full 2010 season with complete weekends of testing, tweaking, qualifying, and lap-count accurate races for gluttonous portions of realism. Gearheads will appreciate the ridiculous levels of car adjustability that can shave precious tenths of a second off lap times, and 12-player online races offer an opportunity to compete against the world.

If—as is with most Americans—the prospect of turning both right *and* left during races seems a foreign concept, *F1 2010* comes equipped with "Live the Life" mode. Think of it is a role-playing game element that tasks players to build and manage the off-track components of their careers (public relations, team politics, sponsorship, scoping out pit girls), while recreating Formula 1's off-track atmosphere and glamour. This lifestyle feature wasn't yet implemented during our hands-on demo, so we're interested to see whether it succeeds in raising F1's profile to U.S. gamers—who don't seem to realize it's the most popular race series in the world. | **Roger Burchill**

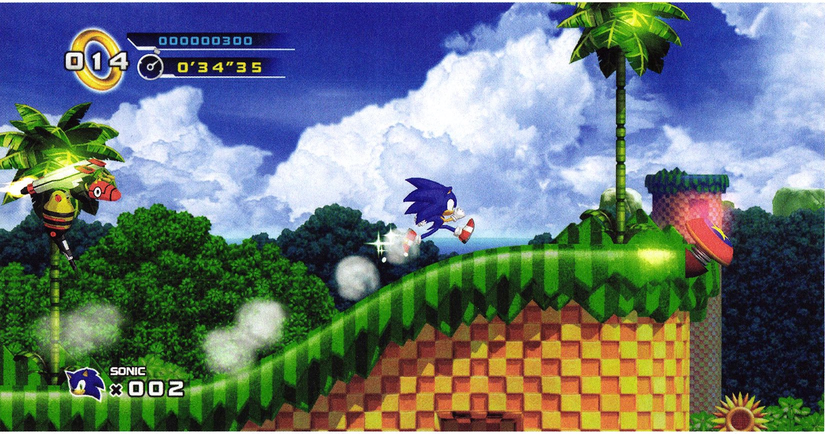


↘ Make on-the-fly car adjustments from the cockpit using the D-pad.



↖ Dynamic weather affects pit strategy, which influences a race's outcome.

PlayStation Gallery



Sonic 4: Episode 1

PSN AVAILABLE: **Late 2010** GENRE: **Action** PUBLISHER: **Sega** DEVELOPER: **Sonic Team**

Sega is billing this as the heir to the throne once occupied by the original Genesis games—and after playing *Sonic 4,* it's a sentiment we wholeheartedly endorse. This is the next-gen Sonic that we've been waiting for: the astounding speed of the 2D classics, enhanced by slick HD visuals. The only major change is a welcome one—they've actually decreased the time it takes Sonic to get up to full speed. Other than that, we experienced the same thrill we once felt when whipping through loops and turns, leaping past spikes, and hurtling through the air. Sega wouldn't tell us how many episodes are planned, but we're told it's a finite amount, and each episode will introduce something new to the gameplay. | Gary Steinman

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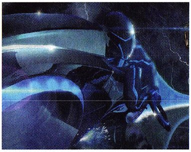
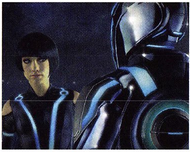
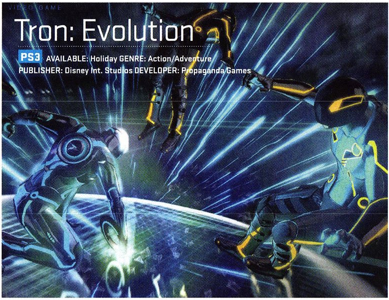
Tron: Evolution

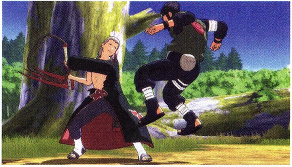
PS3 AVAILABLE: **Holiday** GENRE: **Action/Adventure**
PUBLISHER: **Disney Int. Studios** DEVELOPER: **Propaganda Games**

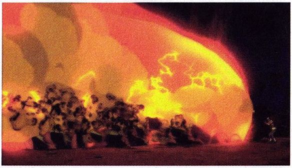






Bridging the gap between the 1982 original *Tron* movie and this fall's *Tron: Legacy, Tron: Evolution* puts us through a series of seismic events in a virtual universe. What's that mean? Think *Prince of Persia* in cyberspace. In a brief playtest, we had to chase another character, vaulting over obstacles, running along walls, and leaping from ledge to ledge in a clambering sequence reminiscent of a certain Persian royal. Combat likewise showcases movement: health is replenished by running along certain spots on walls, and the special-moves meter is filled after leaping over obstacles. The on-foot action is certainly fast—and it only got faster when we took a light cycle for a quick spin… | GS





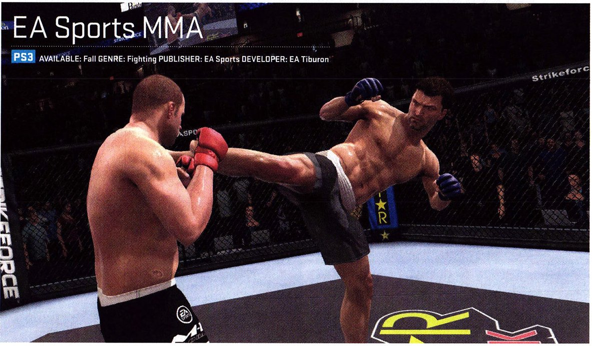
Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 2

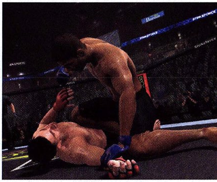
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Fighting **PUBLISHER:** Namco Bandai **DEVELOPER:** CyberConnect2

Much has been said in scholarly circles about a particular young ninja who sports a very un-ninja-like orange jumpsuit—how he flouts ninja rules and how his can-do attitude might, perhaps, be a lesson to us all. But we're no scholars, and when faced with a fighting game this pretty *and* accessible, we'd much prefer to let our thumbs do the talking. *Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 2* pits 40 different characters against each other in 18 interactive levels—and, for the first time, allows for online matches. Finally, we'll get to see how our Rock Lee fares against your Sasuke. | GS

EA Sports MMA

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Fighting **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports **DEVELOPER:** EA Tiburon

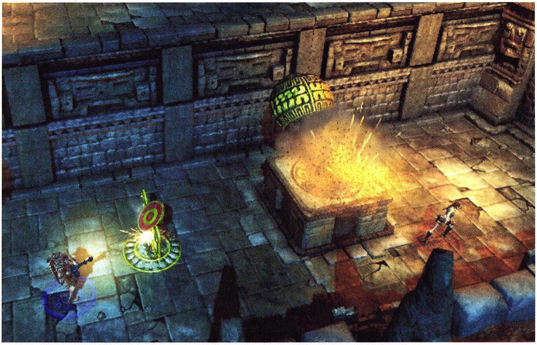


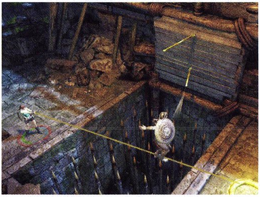


The UFC ain't the only show in town. EA is entering the mixed martial arts fray with a realistic fighter that—with a control scheme similar to its *Fight Night* boxing franchise—seems to prioritize pacing and strategy over raw brute force. Then again, if a player wants to pummel someone until they submit, that's probably okay too. | GS

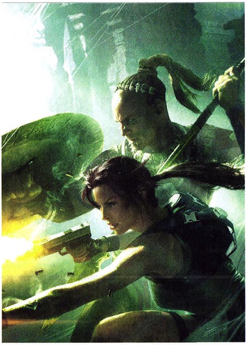
Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light

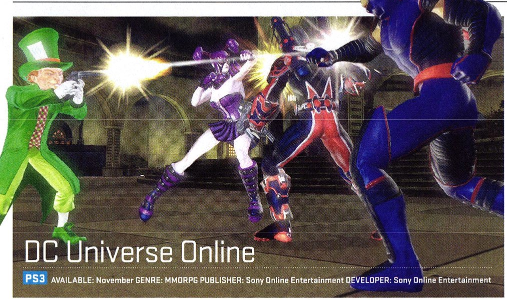
PSN AVAILABLE: August GENRE: Action/Adventure PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Crystal Dynamics





It's always a pleasure to go hands-on with Ms. Croft and our first playtest of her new PlayStation Network adventure proved revelatory. Unlike the full-on exploratory experience of core *Tomb Raider* titles, *Guardian of Light* features arcade-style gameplay from an isometric view perspective (think *Diablo).* Shooting, platforming, and puzzling our way through the creature- and undead-filled ruins of a Central American temple felt satisfyingly old-school, but it's the co-op play with Lara's new partner, ancient-warrior guardian Totec, that adds a welcome new twist to the proceedings. There are multiple possible solutions for solving puzzles or circumventing traps depending on how Lara and Totec's unique weapons, items, and capabilities are utilized. | Roger Burchill

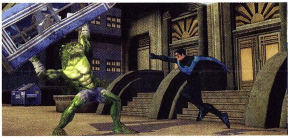


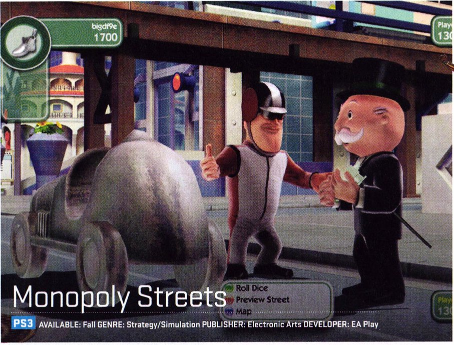


DC Universe Online

PS3 AVAILABLE: November GENRE: MMORPG PUBLISHER: Sony Online Entertainment DEVELOPER: Sony Online Entertainment

They might just have solved the key problem here: how to get a massively multiplayer online RPG—a genre dominated by the PC, with its MMO-friendly mouse and keyboard—to work on console. Controls here are intelligently mapped to the face buttons, and the triggers help scroll among assigned slots. In a brief playtest we found it to be quick and intuitive, letting us easily take our homemade hero into action against a squad of goofy goons led by Harley Quinn. | Gary Steinman

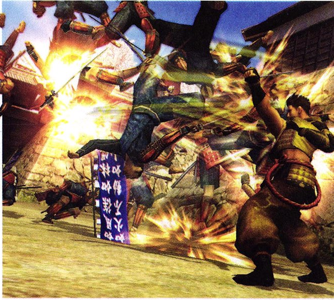




Monopoly Streets

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Strategy/Simulation **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** EA Play

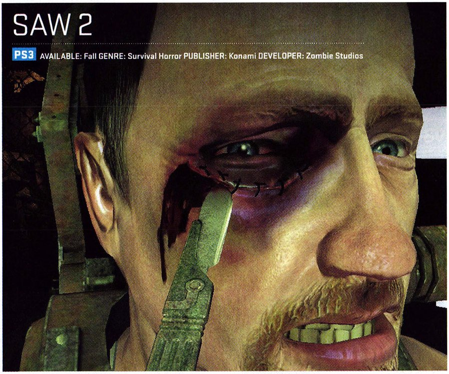
Everyone knows how to play Monopoly, and every generation plays it. And therein lies the ultimate challenge for EA: How to reimagine a classic board game so it feels like a next-gen videogame yet still works for the entire family? The answer is surprisingly simple: Change almost nothing. *Monopoly Streets* has all the same rules and trappings as the original, but it puts the player at the street level in a uniquely Monopoly-themed world. Up-and-coming real estate moguls can hop into an iconic silver car and drive from Baltic Avenue to Boardwalk in a dynamic 3D environment that changes as the players develop and influence different parts of their city. While the basic game is intact, the few new additions are welcome, including an interactive auction in which players can try to bluff and outbid each other, and a scoreboard that instantly tallies who's winning and who's losing. We're already imagining our character rolling down the street in a giant thimble—and crushing your top hat with our outlandishly high rents. | David Murphy



Sengoku Basara: Samurai Warriors

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** TBD **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** Capcom **DEVELOPER:** Capcom

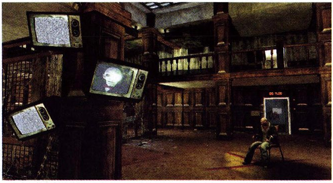
Long spears. Gauntlets. A razor sharp hula-hoop. *Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes* covers all the deadly bases. Set in 16th-century Japan, this beat-'em-up features over a dozen playable warriors and promises a more colorful and over-the-top version of familiar action fighting games like *Dynasty Warriors*. With insane thousand-hit combos, elaborate special moves, and a classic action-slowing bullet-time effect, *Warriors* promises videogame violence done with style. | Scott Butterworth



SAW 2

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Survival Horror **PUBLISHER:** Konami **DEVELOPER:** Zombie Studios

Promotional literature for *SAW 2* suggests the game has a pending ESRB rating. Given the film series' gory, violent nature, Las Vegas odds are very good the videogame will clock in at an M, meaning it is most definitely not meant for children, or people dumb enough to take small children to see the *SAW* films in the theaters. The game presents survival horror in the third-person perspective; the crazy killer Jigsaw is hell-bent on murder by offing his victims with a series of cleverly designed and hurty traps, the deployment of which ensures the victim will have a rather unpleasant day. The game is set between the events of the first two films, and offers up a gruesome series of puzzles, fights, and deadly traps to escape. | Greg Orlando



Planetary Exploration

Media Molecule presents its brand-new world of adventure

Once upon a time, there was a little make-believe boy in a make-believe world. The boy was made of virtual cloth and other people's dreams, and was certainly none the worse for not being real. Expressive and eminently lovable, the boy explored his wondrous world, playing dress-up and having many fine adventures with his friends, all of them equally expressive and eminently lovable.

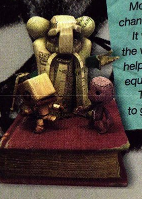
His world was, at once, tiny and enormous. Best of all, the little boy's world could be changed, shaped, decorated. It could be built and rebuilt over and over again, so that this LittleBigPlanet was, at all times unique. And fun.

The adventures could hardly be contained. They demanded to be shared far and wide. And although there were many stories yet to tell, the creators of this world wanted more.

More opportunities. More tools. More themes. More chances to play, to create, and to share.

It was a very good idea, the people who had built the world in the first place thought. Nor could they help but be crushed by the logic of it all: More stuff equals more fun.

The little boy's tiny yet ever-expanding world is about to get a little bigger. **LittleBigPlanet 2** is on its way.



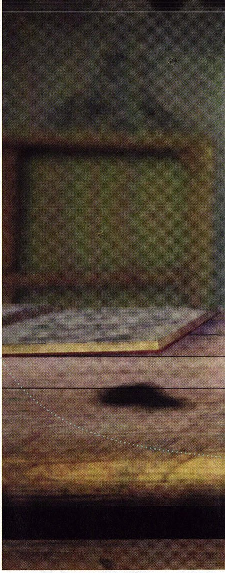
PS3 | **Available:** November | **Publisher:** SCEA | **Developer:** Media Molecule

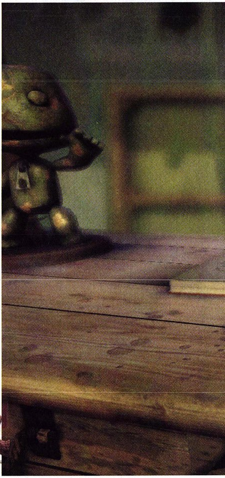
FACTORY
OF A BETTER TOMORROW

by Greg Orlando

NEWTON
PRINCIPIA-METALMATICA

If you want to learn more about Sackboy and his story right away, look over here.





Sony impressed no one by tossing a virtual TV down a flight of non-existent stairs.

It was three years ago. Sony showed up at the 2007 Game Developer's Conference in San Francisco with its new virtual world, Home. One of Home's great draws, according to Phil Harrison, then-president for Sony Computer Entertainment Worldwide Studios, was that the TV sets in this virtual universe could be made to play videos…*and then be dropped down stairs where they would bounce and roll with realistic physics.*

It went over as well as a TV bouncing down a flight of stairs could ever go.

Harrison also showed off Media Molecule's *LittleBigPlanet.* It was a half-game, half-game creator hybrid with a central character that looked like a blobby, burlap-covered children's toy. It had absolutely no TVs, but a wonderful sense of whimsy. The little blobby boy (called Sackboy) and his three blobby friends were shown having a fun adventure culminating with them hanging on for dear life as they rode a skateboard down a huge ramp.

LittleBigPlanet became the little game that could. Although it's perhaps boorish to cite sales figures, the game has sold more than three million copies. Using *LittleBigPlanet's* tools, players have created and shared some 2.3 million game levels. Numerous game of the year awards stand as testament to the game's ingenuity and quality.

"After the success of *LBP* we thought, 'Holy moley. How do we expand on this? How do we take this incredible investment of people, of time, and creativity, and then take it forward?'" Alex Evans, co-founder of Media Molecule says.

The answer was simple: sequel.

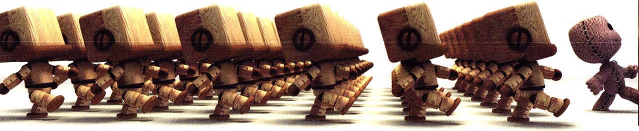
London Calling

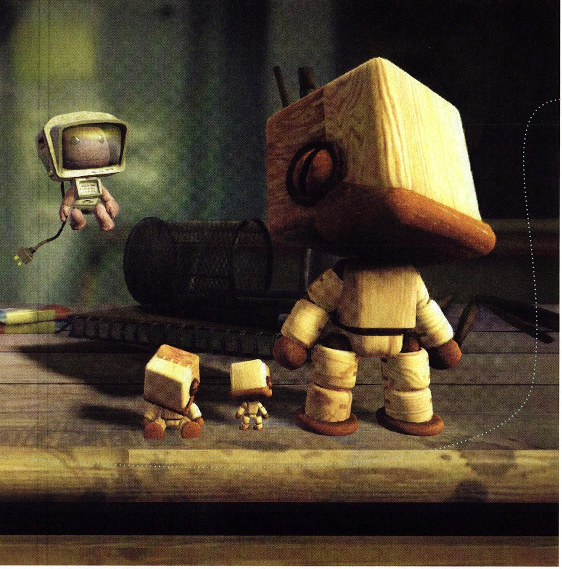
It's a relatively warm spring day in London as Media Molecule shows off the still early in its development *LittleBigPlanet 2.* Outside, all throughout the United Kingdom, general parliamentary elections are being held, ones that will eventually lead to a deadlocked government. A compromise government, as of this writing, was just recently established.

Compromise is not on the menu for *LBP 2.* The creators are adamant about the game being wholly backward compatible, even though this may not be realistically possible. Nothing, absolutely nothing, they insist will be lost from the original game. "We really built on the idea that everything people had invested in with *LittleBigPlanet* they can take forward into *LittleBigPlanet 2*," Evans says, "but then we'll give you a ton of new building blocks that allow you to actually go way beyond what you've ever done in the first game."

Levels created with *LittleBigPlanet* will see an upgrade even without the sequel's new features. Objects in the world now cast shadows, creating a greater sense of depth. In-game lighting and color can be altered and modified, and Evans claims this gives everything a greater sense of context, making levels easier to play.

"[It's] a huge technical albatross around our neck, but it's totally worth it," he says.





Sackboy's Story

When it came time to create *LittleBigPlanet's* iconic protagonist, Media Molecule had to answer one question: *How do you make a character that's both recognizable, and a blank canvas?*

ALEX EVANS,
CO-FOUNDER OF MEDIA MOLECULE

"The original Sackboy was very blobby. His silhouette just didn't speak or pop. Francis [Pang, lead artist] the ultimate creator of Sackboy—he modeled him, he animated him, and he designed the actual shape—took this blobby character which had no definition, and tightened up his silhouette.

The way that came about was quite funny: Kareem [Ettouney], the art director, had basically drawn these oil paintings of the blobby character with string tied around his joints to give this pinched look. Kareem's thing was like something out of a David Lynch-nightmare movie, some sort of horrific Wicker Man. But the key to it was, it was instantly recognizable. The silhouette was there. Francis combined the cuter, blobbier character with a really key silhouette. It all comes down to Francis in the end."

KAREEM ETTOUNEY,
CO-FOUNDER OF MEDIA MOLECULE

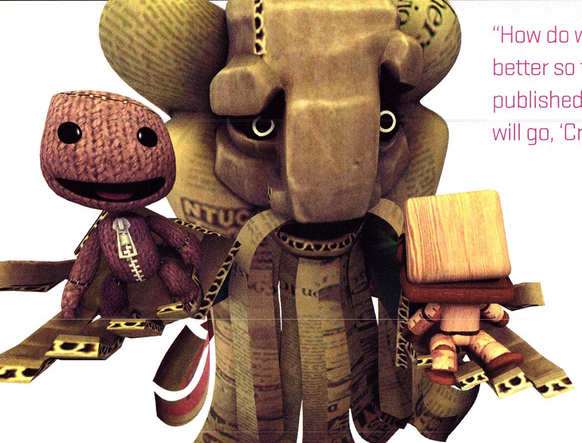
"We spent half of the project's time designing him. We did so many drawings at the time—because we did want the cute, baby proportions. For example, the big head is good, but also practical because you get to see the expression and the acting on the screen. Also, the pinched arms and feet are cool because they look rag-dolly, but they're also athletic and because it's a physical game it sort of allowed for more flexible movement."

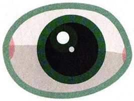
"We really built on the idea that everything people had invested in with *LittleBigPlanet* they can take forward into *LittleBigPlanet 2.*"

—ALEX EVANS

"How do we make the game look better so that everyone who's ever published a level in *LittleBigPlanet* will go, 'Crap! That looks amazing!'"

—ALEX EVANS





"We've remastered the whole graphic engine," says Evans. "Our task was without changing a single pixel, a single texture, a single art asset: How do we make the game look better so that everyone who's ever published a level in *LittleBigPlanet* will be able to boot it and go, 'Crap! That looks amazing! I didn't realize my level was that awesome.'"

And that's without the new stuff, the stuff Evans suggests will melt people's brains.

The Creation Myth

Now, it's all about games.

Previously, *LittleBigPlanet* only allowed for the creation of individual levels. It was possible to hint at a game as a whole, sure, but it required trickery. Players had to cobble together individual levels each of which was considered a singular unit. This required a keen eye for continuity between the stages on the part of the creator and, for the players, a willing suspension of disbelief as each segment had to be individually booted.

As the saying aptly goes, *that was then, this is now. LittleBigPlanet 2* allows for the seamless linking of levels and, thus, the creation of entire games. Further, as Evans says, it's Media Molecule's goal to take *LittleBigPlanet* way beyond the platform experience.

Media Molecule's promotional movies don't lie—the world of *LittleBigPlanet* has been dramatically expanded. As the images zip past in rapid-fire succession, it's possible to see player-controlled sackboys riding mice through a top-down perspective maze; a recreation of the classic ball-and-paddle game *Breakout;* a side-scrolling vehicle-based shooter; an homage to *Space Invaders* featuring a sackgirl riding an insect; and someone's delightful interpretation of the ball-shooting, bubble-popping *Bubble Bobble* (with *LBP's* ubiquitous mascot standing in for the goofy whatsits Bub and Bob).

These tantalizing possibilities are followed up with a bold claim. Media Molecule is betting, given the tools and the vast wealth of imagination, patience, and creative spark shown by the community at large, that it won't be long before someone uses *LittleBigPlanet 2* to create a brand-new game genre.

Suddenly, Sackbots!

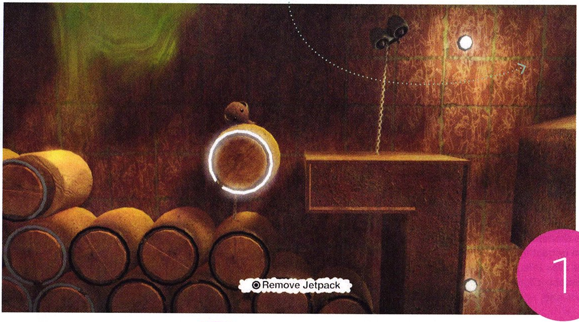
Perhaps the boldest step forward for *LittleBigPlanet 2* is the addition of the sackbot, a blocky, wooden construct with a hinged jaw. Sackbots are *tabula rasa,* a blank slate on which players can work exceedingly detailed magic.

What makes a great level anyway? Find out right here and skip all the blah blah blah.

Fantastic Five

COMMUNITY MANAGER **JAMES SPAFFORD'S** FAVORITE USER-CREATED LBP LEVELS

"It's always hard to pick out a few levels from the pool of over two million that we have to choose from, so I'd like to stress that these are by no means 'the best five levels' but are five of my personal favorites."



1

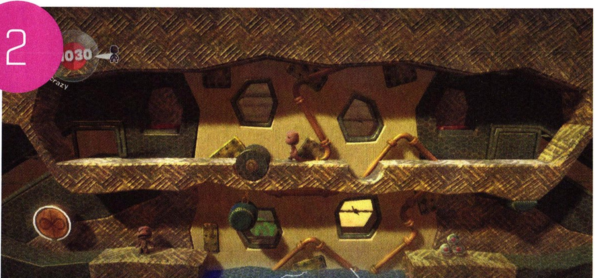
← SAVE, DIE, RELOAD BY CARLSEN JEPPE

This level shows how you can take an established game mechanic, turn it on its head, and make something new. In this case, players are required to move the spawn gates around by various means, and then kill themselves to traverse various puzzles. It's all in the name!

2

→ INDUSTRIAL ASSISTANCE 2 BY JACKOFCOURSE

I love this level as an excellent example of competitive cooperative gameplay. It features a whole load of well thought out puzzles for two players to solve together, plus a splitscreen-style race section. It's two players only, but one of my favorites for sure!



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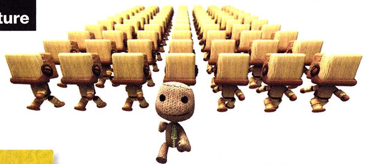


To the point, sackbots are artificial intelligence constructions, meant to serve as non-player characters in the *LittleBigPlanet* game world. As with Sackboy, they're wholly customizable in terms of their appearance. They can be grown or shrunk, colored, decorated, given facial features, and similarly tinkered with ad nauseam. The green-skinned, bullet-headed sackbot, say, pays homage to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.*

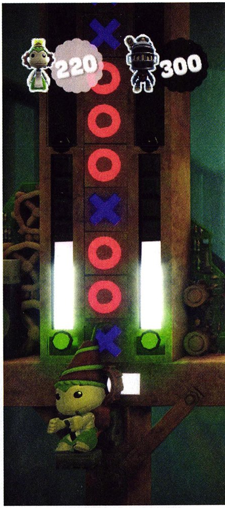
The voice that follows sounds very much like an infomercial pitchman, urgent and loud enough to stir the recently interred. *But wait, there's more!* Media Molecule promises intelligent sackbots with programmable behaviors. Sackbots can be tagged with basic commands, allowing them, say, to lumber and plod along with their arms out in a zombie shuffle. Or they can be fully programmed using a "circuit board" of sorts, a literal in-game plank onto which specific behaviors and responses to stimuli can be dragged and dropped. This circuit board acts as a sackbot's brain and it, like everything else in the game, can be duplicated and shared with the community at large.

The circuit board may stand as a remarkable achievement. At bare minimum, it's a wonderful experiment in user-created AI. A bounty of options means a sackbot can be electrified; imbued with a fear of heights; instructed to follow the nearest sackboy; made to flee, patrol, attack, jump, etc. In this way, players are able to create, modify, and interact with allies and enemies whose actions are wholly logical—or incredibly illogical, should the circumstance dictate. Now, the possibilities—fueled by players' creativity and the community's willingness to share, plus its desire to improve on existing designs—seem endless.

Sackbots can also be used in tandem with sackboys to create in-game cutscenes or, simply, user-created films. To highlight this aspect of the game, Media Molecule created its own mini-disco, populated it with sackbots (cloned from an original design and then made to look different), and set them to a virulent case of boogie fever that, as The Sylvers theorized, is in fact contagious and oftentimes going around.

Multiple cameras were placed to capture the dancing action. Players can specify which camera captures the action at any one time, or the cameras can be randomized. Zooms and pans can add to the dramatic effect, or a shaky cam can detract from it (a la the odious *The Blair Witch Project* or the more palatable *Cloverfield).* Scenes can be filmed, edited, and inserted amid gameplay or left as a standalone movie. These scenes can be further enhanced with voiceovers and user-recorded sound effects.

LittleBigPlanet 2 also promises—and delivers—smarter vehicles. This time around, gadgets can be mapped to the PS3 controller through what Media Molecule calls a direct drive seat. In this way, it will be possible to attach specific features (gunfire, acceleration, shields, brakes, horns, etc.) to any button, trigger, motion control direction, or analog stick that feels right. Already, Media Molecule has shown sackboys perched upon fluffy and wheeled mechanical dogs and a fairy-like sackgirl piloting a metal dragonfly. A malleable camera ensures game creators can cobble together a mouse race with sackboy jockeys seen from a top-down perspective, or that the fairy sackgirl can blast the hell out of cassette-tape enemies in a horizontal side-scroller before shifting dramatically into a vertical shooter all-too-reminiscent of Taito's seminal *Space Invaders.*



Sackboy's most intimate secrets for all to see right away.

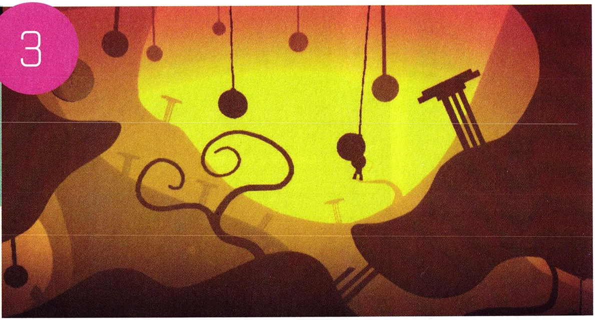
Sackbots can be programmed using a "circuit board," a literal in-game plank onto which specific behaviors can be dragged and dropped.

Fantastic Five

3

→ SWINGING SILHOUETTE BY ANTPOSTTELLER

This level is gorgeous to look at and has the gameplay to back it up too. It even features its own set of "trophies" for players to collect by performing various challenges within the level. It can be tricky in places, but persevere: It's worth it.



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Three Sackboy Fun Facts

1) WHAT'S WITH SACKBOY'S ZIPPER?

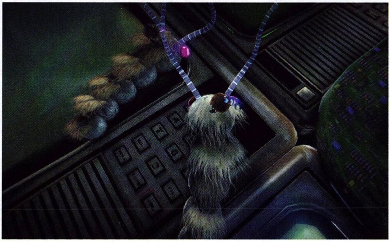
Kareem Ettouney: "That was a legacy from Mark [Healey, Media Molecule co-founder]. You know where the moon is and you can go and create your own levels? The first idea for that was that you create inside Sackboy. So he opens the zipper and you go inside there and that's where creation happens. That idea didn't make it, but the idea stayed."

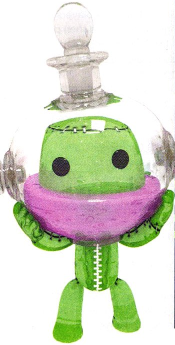
2) SACKBOY'S MEDICINAL APPLICATIONS

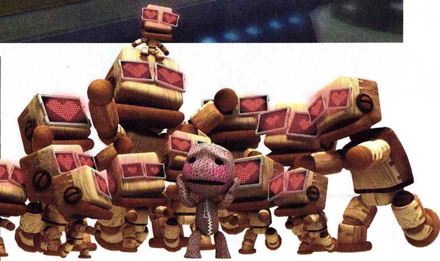
Alex Evans: "We got forwarded a study in something like *The Lancet* or the *British Medical Journal*—I forget which—and they'd done studies of kids in pain in hospitals, and they found that they could use *LittleBigPlanet's* D-pad [Sackboy] emotions to communicate their state of mind—especially autistic children, or children with learning disabilities. And that's just mind-blowingly awesome."

3) A MOST INTRIGUING BUG

Evans wasn't supposed to spill the beans about a now-released (and, oddly, previously announced) Wolverine Sackboy, but as he did he noted the outsourcers of the material, a Swedish developer called Tarzier noted a distinctly odd bug for the character: Wholly unintended, the sackboy would pop its claws when players activated the angry emotion.





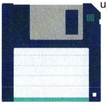


Six specific design themes will be available for game creators, aesthetic schemes that too reflect Media Molecule's careful thought and planning. Each captures the feel of a historical era and is then augmented by a seemingly disparate notion or theme. Among them are "steam and cake," the incredibly odd yet inspired fusion of Victorian delicacy plus steampunk's fantastical machinery; and "neon propaganda," a blend of futuristic gloss plus McCarthy-era poster design. (Or, as Media Molecule co-founder Kareem Ettouney cryptically notes, "James Dean meets, ah, I don't want to be controversial.")

Sharing Is Caring

"We have struck a chord with people because we celebrate them," Ettouney says. Media Molecule built its *LittleBigPlanet* on the mantra "play, create, share." It gave players access to its tools and its funny little sackboys and told them to go have fun with them. While the emphasis for *LittleBigPlanet 2,* at least at this early stage, has been placed squarely on *create,* neither *play* nor *share* has been neglected.

With *LittleBigPlanet 2,* the developers plan to expand on the players' ability to share in some very tangible ways. Evans says it's time to tear down the "wall of obfuscation" that may have prevented game players from finding and/or accessing great user-created levels.



Central to this idea is Lbp.me, a website where each player can have his own page. A personal address will be linked to a PSN screen name and the site will be continuously updated. Here, people can share their levels quickly and easily; each new creation will get its own unique web address that can be posted and shared on social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter.

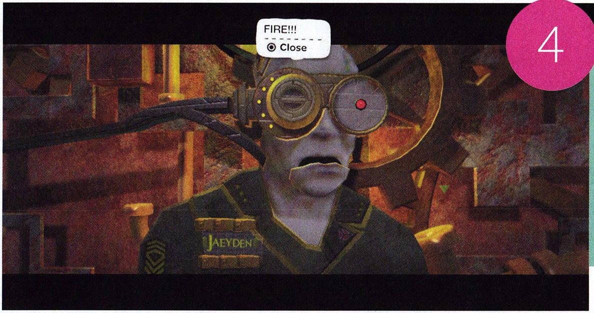
The idea, of course, is to have more levels seen by more players, but Lbp.me also allows for greater accessibility in that it lets players select intriguing levels and then put them on a list to be downloaded to their PS3s at a later time. Players can also opt to instantly leap into a chosen level provided, of course, they have a computer and a PS3 booted up simultaneously. There's even an option to download levels utilizing the PS Eye peripheral—individual codes, in the form of a sticker, are issued to each created game level and these can be photographed (via cell phone) and read with the PS Eye.

Befriending the right people will ensure players have an endless supply of astounding content to access. It will also allow game creators to better push and challenge one another, which can only lead to bigger and better things.

Fantastic Five

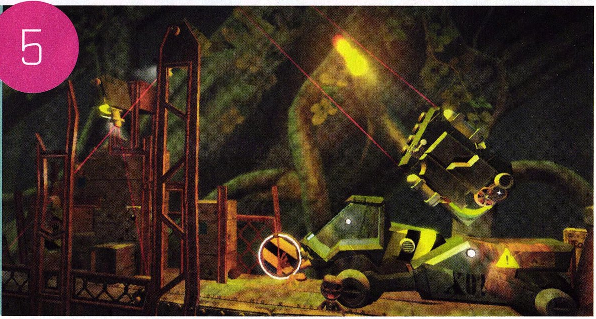
4

← SUBMARINE SABOTAGE BY WEXFORDIAN (WITH FULLGORR AND JAEYDEN)
This is an awesome example of how creators can jam together, using their various skills to make something that really shines. Three people made this level using the online create mode, and it is one of the most polished, well thought out, fun levels out there. It was also one of the first to use the water tools we added in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* level kit.



5

→ FUTURE WAR ONE BY JOHNEE
This level is made with a really intense attention to detail, and when we saw it last summer it really grabbed our attention. The creations and ideas in this level helped to inspire the community to think in new ways and build new things. We love that our community constantly grows as creators by inspiring one another. Between this level and some of his other creations, we were so impressed with this creator that we hired him to work on *LittleBigPlanet 2!*



Playtime

"The interesting thing about *LittleBigPlanet 2,*" Evans says, "is we're opening with 50 new story levels, give or take, and two million existing levels. So there's plenty to play there."

To swipe liberally and abuse the now well-worn cliché, the play is indeed the thing for Media Molecule.

"It's the gateway drug into the *LittleBigPlanet* world," Evans says. "You're pulled in by the story, you're charmed by the world, and you're rewarded with all the things you need to then to dive into the community and experience millions of levels."

There's not much word on the game's single-player campaign, but Media Molecule suggests it revolves around a world being drained of its creativity. Cryptically, Ettouney notes, "The most extreme costume we're doing for *LittleBigPlanet 2,* doesn't look like Sackboy at all. They completely look like a unique character, and we're using them as non-player characters." This creation will appear as a focal point in the game's story mode.

More tangible and intriguing bits reveal themselves during a brief playtest of some Media Molecule-created levels. Sackboy can shoot a neon beam of light from a grapple gun, enabling him to swing wildly across gaps. This is a brand-new tool; Media Molecule promises there will be more. Enlarged sackbots can carry cradles of sorts; sackboys can enter these cradles and then maneuver around the game world as if children toted by a parent.

LittleBigPlanet 2 also expands on the franchise by adding an online, competitive multiplayer aspect—a new feature that was just announced at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3).

Sony showed off this feature with three videos: "Fenderbender," "Rockets," and "Superblockrace." All featured four sackbots pitted against one another in rather simple challenges. Rockets presented a series of platforms amid a space-themed background with a red, ringed planet serving as the centerpiece. Deathmatch-style action ensued, with sackboys leaping about blasting the garbanzos out of one another with projectiles for three minutes. A rotating circular arena played host to a bumper-car challenge in Fenderbender; sackboys rode in circular vehicles aiming to smash their competitors into an electrified outer wall. A frenzied game-show style contest was presented with Superblockrace, as sackboys were required to match a rapidly descending series of Xs and Os from a vertical column in order to score points.

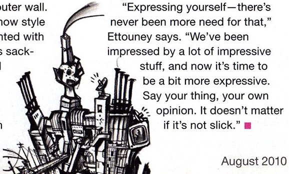
All of this seems tailor-made for a goofy, tongue-in-cheek effort such as *LittleBigPlanet 2.* And with endless possibilities for creator-made efforts, online multiplayer seems an absolutely fine addition to the canon.

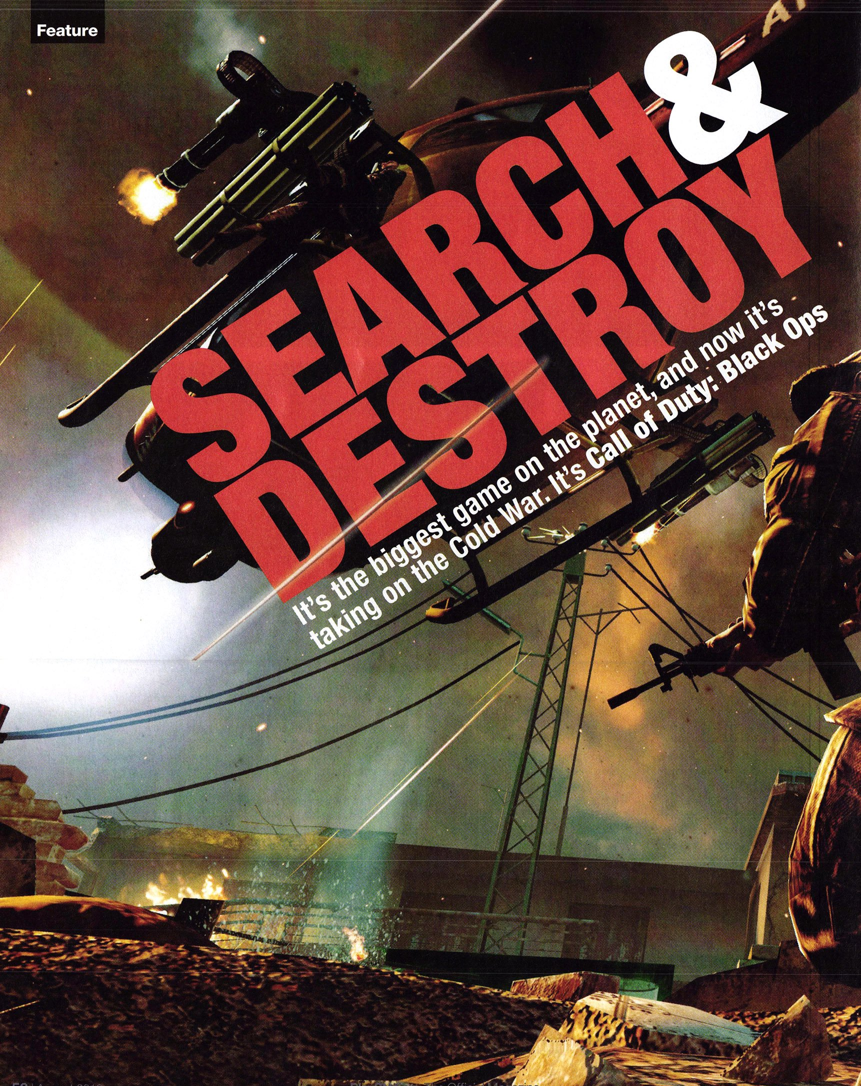
LittlePlanet, Big Dreams

The stage is set, and it seems silly to belabor the point, but Media Molecule seems to have found its stride, its *raison d'être*.

"How do you give the people the means to create good games?" Evans asks.

"Expressing yourself—there's never been more need for that," Ettouney says. "We've been impressed by a lot of impressive stuff, and now it's time to be a bit more expressive. Say your thing, your own opinion. It doesn't matter if it's not slick." ■





SEARCH & DESTROY

It's the biggest game on the planet, and now it's taking on the Cold War. It's **Call of Duty: Black Ops**

"ONCE THE TARGET'S DESIGNATED, THE CHOPPER HOSES IT."

There's something about the new *Call of Duty* we can't quite put our finger on. Something good. The shooting's aces, the action explodes from the screen, and there are more inventive and exciting ideas than we've seen from the series in quite a while. But what's really surprising, and what takes just that little bit longer to register, is just how much the '60s kicked ass.

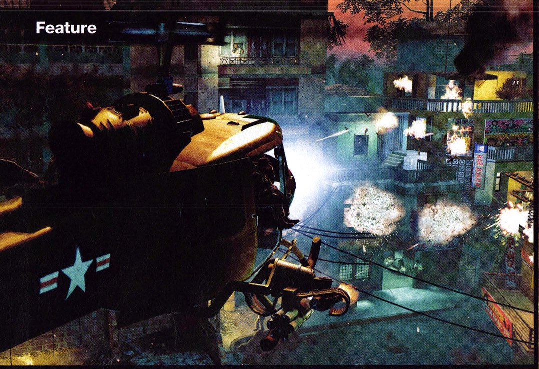
Think of the style of Sean Connery's Bond, the bleak threat of Cold War espionage, and the damp jungle claustrophobia or shocking violence of 'Nam movies like *The Deer Hunter* or *Platoon.* It's perfect for a shooter and *Call of Duty: Black Ops*—set over a 10-year plot that (so far) takes in the Vietnam War and secret Russian incursions—has it all. Plus, you know those big old IBM computers with the spinning tape reels on the front? They look amazing exploding into sparks under a hail of M16 gunfire.

NEW BATTLES

This is a different kind of *CoD* than anything we've seen before, leaving behind the creaky old guns and battles of World War II (bye D-Day. Don't hurry back, y'hear?) but avoiding the trappings of the present-day action of the *Modern Warfare* series. Instead *Black Ops* combines the best of both eras, mixing modern weaponry with iconic history as we're placed in control of one of the original spec ops units—the Studies and Observations Group, or SOG.

"Black Ops soldiers during the Cold War had the power to take on missions as they saw fit," explains Treyarch's studio head Mark Lamia. "They used unconventional warfare and had complete authority to do what they wanted because if they were captured or killed their country would disavow them. It means we can get creative with our levels."

What that means becomes clear during a mission set in 1968 over Vietnam's Houng River, playing as a soldier called Mason. After the chopper we're in is shot down, we come around in a partially submerged wreck. Before we can collect our senses, the windscreen explodes with gunfire, the pilot takes a chestfull of bullets, and we shoot back. The bad guys go down but the disturbance causes the helicopter to sink, forcing us to swim through murky water, as bubble trails from bullets whiz past. We surface behind an attacking Viet Cong and use

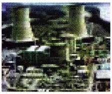


← Fighting through Hue City becomes a lot easier when we can call in chopper attacks.

Deniable Ops

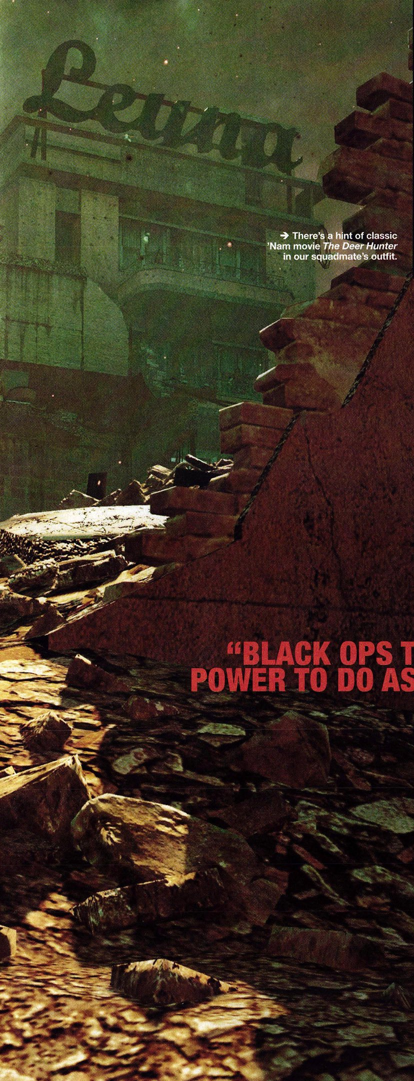
Possible Cold War hot spots

Cuban Missile Crisis
In 1962, a U.S. spy plane discovered secret Russian missile bases being built in Cuba. It brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Sending in a recon team to scope the site would be a perfect mission for the SOG team.



Three Mile Island
This Pennsylvania nuclear power plant was the site of one of the worst atomic accidents ever, when it experienced a partial meltdown in 1979. Let's pretend it wasn't an accident but sabotage, and we were sent there to stop it.

Iranian Embassy Siege
This 1980 London hostage situation is pushing the game's timeline a bit, but the British SAS commandos storming the building is such an iconic image that Treyarch would miss a trick if *Black Ops* didn't include something similar.



➔ There's a hint of classic 'Nam movie *The Deer Hunter* in our squadmate's outfit.

him as a meat shield to take the rest out, a gratuitous slo-mo camera following the final bullet into the last soldier's face. To be honest, the bullet bit's ridiculous, but it was incredible up until then.

From there we move through enemy territory, sneaking carefully through buildings, slitting the sleeping VCs' throats as we find them in their hammocks. The level of detail is exceptional, with huts standing on stilts set among rich, thick foliage. At one point we go beneath the structures, wading silently through the water as a squadmate silences enemies above and quietly drops the bodies out of windows to disappear in the murky depths. Eventually we locate the rest of the team and open warfare breaks out. When a RPG destroys a wooden structure, we ask if everything is destructible. "Depending upon the level, that's not necessarily the case," answers Lamia. "It's not a physics sim—it's not about blowing holes in environments. If you expect it to blow up, it will."

"BLACK OPS TROOPS HAD THE POWER TO DO AS THEY SAW FIT."

Next we find ourselves entering underground tunnels—nervously pushing into the darkness with a feeble flashlight, the threat of sudden attack constantly pressing in from the darkness. It's almost inevitable when a guerrilla leaping from the shadows viciously guts our point man. But before we get a chance to worry about it, we're joined by a surprisingly familiar face: Resnov, the vicious Soviet sniper from *World at War,* who appears to be pulling a Captain Price and relocating from WWII to the game's present day. He's still Russian and he's still bloodthirsty, but he now looks a damn sight cooler in an all-black, old-school spec ops outfit.

OPEN FIRE

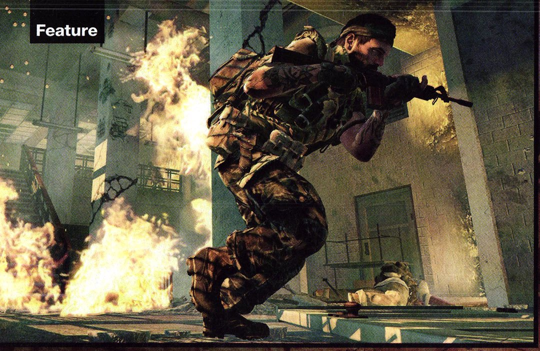
Another mission involves fighting the North Vietnamese Army in Hue City. It demonstrates a more chaotic, close-quarters style of play, initially fighting through buildings with a powerful new weapon called the Dragon's Breath—a shotgun with incendiary rounds that rip through enemies while setting them alight. Can't get more thorough than that.

The fight then moves to the streets. It's a chaotic battle along narrow roads, using a radio to call out enemy-filled buildings to an overhead Huey. When a target's designated, the chopper hoses it with twin miniguns. It's an apocalyptic level of shock and awe, the noise and anarchy creating an incredible level of exhilaration as we battle from alley to alley.

The final Vietnam level, however, is something totally unexpected. Having escaped from a Laotian POW camp, the action sees the SOG seize control of a Hind helicopter. Initially, we clench: *CoD's* attempts at flying in the past have been limited to on-rails levels. But as the chopper clears the trees, two things become evident. Firstly, we're in full control (apart from altitude), steering and firing rockets and twin guns. Secondly, it looks incredible—a huge spacious valley filled with tree-covered mountains, most of which is ours to fly through as we open up on soldiers, bridges, camps, and other helicopters.

SOVIET KITSCH

Lamia won't talk too much about the plot, other than that it spans "decades" and is "worldwide," so the story behind the Russian level is unclear. Playing as an unnamed pilot, it begins with a walk to an SR-71 Blackbird. Ahead of us our co-pilot awaits in the bright orange flight suit and space helmet needed to fly high-altitude reconnaissance. Once airborne, we guide a squad below via a grainy monitor. It's a retro '60s



← Don't risk investigating houses filled with VC. Blast the buildings and *then* count the bodies.

version of the AC-130 mission from *CoD4*. But instead of letting rip with massive guns, we're spotting—picking out enemies and directing the team below to safe areas.

Moments later, we're in control of one of the soldiers on the ground, infiltrating an enemy base in the powder-covered mountains. It looks gorgeous as layers of dense snow flutter across the mountainous area's panoramic vistas. Despite the size of the level, it's all locked at 60fps. "This is really important," explains Lamia. "It's one of the main reasons *Call of Duty* games look so good."

> "EVERYTHING MELTS INTO SLOW MOTION AS WE OPEN FIRE."

SILENT APPROACH

The mission starts stealthily, sneaking past guards and crouching beneath fallen trees before rappelling down a cliff, to reach a building below. Our time on the rope ends with an incredible breach sequence: pushing off from a window, everything melts into slo-mo as we open fire, shattering the glass and swinging into the room in a glittering cloud of shards, plugging the occupants before they can react.

"There's a difference in AI seen when playing Viet Cong and Russian Spetsnaz," adds Lamia. "This helps maintain the notion of variety." The Viet Cong run at you with little regard for their lives. It takes speed and accuracy to put them down before they get too close. In contrast, the Spetsnaz take cover and push forward intelligently. It demands skill to take them out—as demonstrated by a tech demo of Russian soldiers using rolls and other maneuvers to avoid trouble.

BROKEN ARROW

We also get to see a new weapon—a crossbow equipped with standard bolt for stealth kills, and explosive tipped arrows for incredibly satisfying booms. The mission ends as we're scaling the side of a mountain. An enemy fires an RPG, triggering an avalanche and leading to a dramatic escape, with the SOG team leaping from the mountain's edge as it collapses around them, and then parachuting to safety.

Everything we see looks fantastic, and typically *Call of Duty*, with intense action sequences mixed with movie-quality set pieces. Just one question, though: what about the multiplayer? Lamia isn't talking about that yet but drops hints of "significantly different" create-a-class options and separate, dedicated four-player co-op, on- and offline. He then adds, "The three areas we honed in on as our pillars were player experience, social experience, and competitive experience."

"Social experience" sounds interesting, although Lamia only drops teasers about upgraded social features that will let us "interact with people about the game, not necessarily just in the game." Lamia also adds that it will be a mode "we'll build on over time." Could it be the new zombie mode we all want? Infuriatingly, however, all questions about the return of the excellent survival game are met with smiley "no comments."

Lamia says, "We'll hopefully be the ultimate entertainment package for gamers." ■

Interview

We sit down with Treyarch studio head **Mark Lamia** to talk Cold War, zombies, and Infinity Ward

You've had more freedom and resources than ever this time around. How has that influenced *Black Ops*?

I think it's made a big impact. It really opened up our thinking. The period of the Cold War is a larger period of time, and we were able to pick and choose the sort of events that we felt would be appropriate for how we wanted to craft our story and the kind of gameplay that we wanted to do. I would say it was probably the most expansive we've ever been able to be because of the setting.

Do you see *Black Ops* becoming a benchmark game in the *Call of Duty* franchise?

I'm going to leave that assessment to you. What you're talking about is a subjective measure. I know people like to make all these comparisons, but we're just going to make our best game and put everything we've got into it. Hopefully, people will want to play it. Whether or not it's better than someone else's game... I'll let the game speak for itself.

The zombie mode in *World at War* was so good it gained its own cult following. We assume you'll be bringing the undead back in *Black Ops,* right?

Gosh. That's cool and we're glad everyone likes it. Clearly the creative shackles were off when we went about creating that mode. We really like the zombie mode, and as I mentioned I can't talk about the co-op mode other than to say that one of the reasons why we love it so much is that it feels like it was a fan-adopted mode, made out of the passion of a lot of the team members here. The community helped make it what it was, and helped shape what we did with the follow-up content. It was like a collaborative design effort. It holds a special place for us and we'll see what the future holds for it.

With its following though, surely zombies will return in this game...

Do you guys want to see it?

Yes.

Okay. Well all I can tell you is that we listen to the fan base. Those are our consumers, so...

It looks great. What are the key improvements with the engine?

From a big-picture perspective, we have better visuals. Under better visuals, we have improved water, fire, better jungle environments, better foliage, and bigger environments in general. We have streaming technology, which allows us to put more detail into levels. We've got an enhanced audio engine. We've enhanced our multiplayer engine. The tools we use have improved hugely as well, allowing shorter iteration changes and to make a better game.

We'll take that as a hint. Have you been experimenting with PlayStation Move?

No. It's not what we're doing with this game design. I think it's an interesting piece of technology but it's not a focus of ours. If we were to do it now, then it would be engineering it into a game that we didn't design for it. Maybe there's a future game out there that is designed to leverage that new interface. Whether or not we do something with PS Move remains to be seen.

The first 3D TVs are arriving, what are your feelings toward the tech?

I'm very interested in it. Given what we do here, we need to understand our platform in order to maximize [3D] to be appropriate for our technology and game design, and these things take years to develop. So on the other side of *Black Ops,* we'll be talking.

¡ES EL FUE

WE THOUGHT THE WWE WAS CRAZY.

¡ES EL MAS FUERTE!

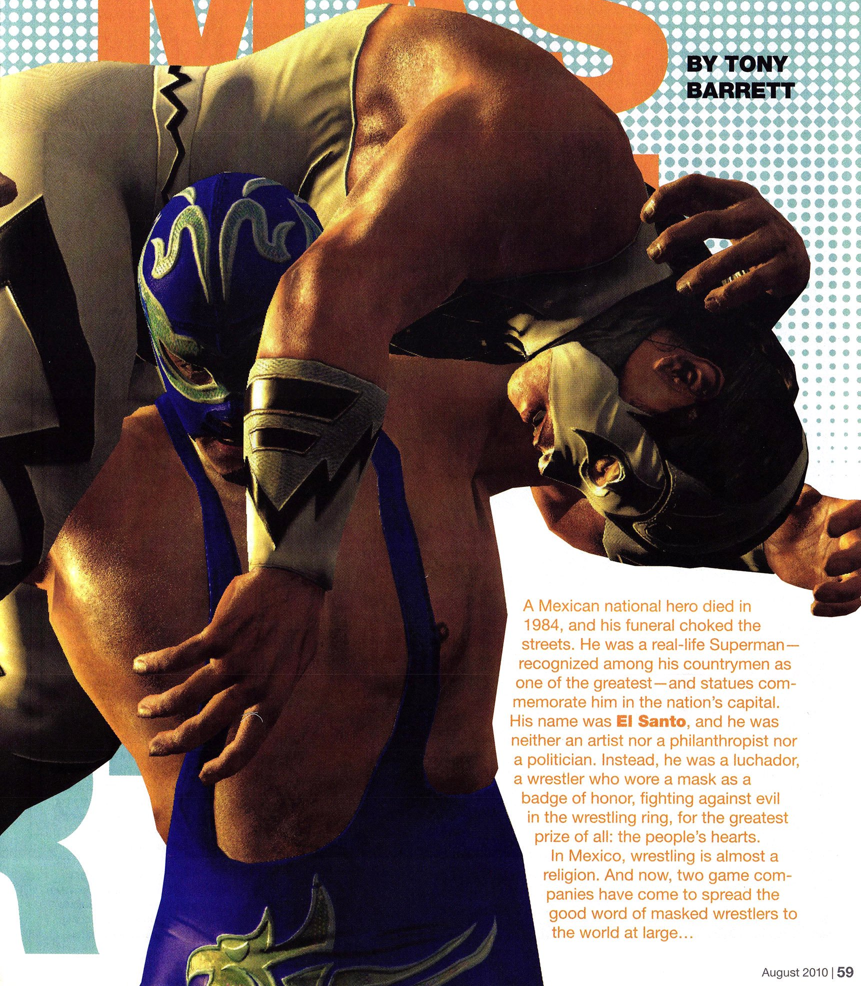
(THE MOST STRONG)

¡ES E FUE

THEN WE DISCOVERED MEXICAN WRESTLING...

MAS

BY TONY BARRETT

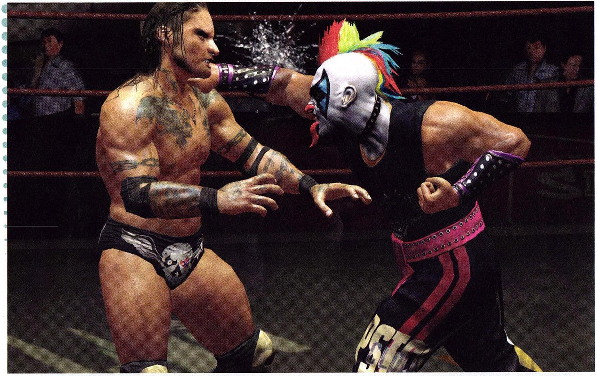


A Mexican national hero died in 1984, and his funeral choked the streets. He was a real-life Superman—recognized among his countrymen as one of the greatest—and statues commemorate him in the nation's capital. His name was **El Santo**, and he was neither an artist nor a philanthropist nor a politician. Instead, he was a luchador, a wrestler who wore a mask as a badge of honor, fighting against evil in the wrestling ring, for the greatest prize of all: the people's hearts.

In Mexico, wrestling is almost a religion. And now, two game companies have come to spread the good word of masked wrestlers to the world at large…

AAA: HEROES DEL RING

PS3 | **AVAILABLE:** AUGUST | **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI / SLANG | **DEVELOPER:** IMMERSION



Mexican wrestling defies logic. It's akin to the circus, if the circus exploded. Everything is loud and fast-paced; wrestlers are screaming, the announcers are screaming, the fans are screaming, the referees are screaming. Dangerous and acrobatic antics are being performed inside and outside the ring and, sometimes, amid the audience members.

It's grand theater and low comedy, played out by athletic men, oftentimes wearing masks. And it's essential here, like the golden rule: Don't mess with a man's mask.

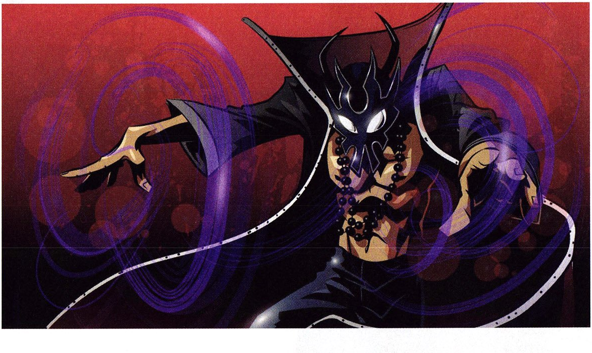
"It's like if Spider-Man's identity were revealed."

Federico Beyer is explaining why the masks are so important in lucha libre. The director of Konami's *AAA: Heroes Del Ring* has just schooled us in an online mask vs. mask match. In real life, such matches occur because of deep rivalries, and the stakes are significant: If the mask is removed, the loser can't put it back on.

As the first game to feature Mexican wrestling, *Ring* has the task of not only establishing a franchise—but pretty well having to establish a genre. "We see ourselves as ambassadors of lucha libre," Beyer says.

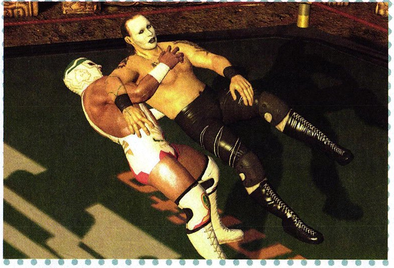
RUDO RESURRECTION

PSN | **AVAILABLE:** TBD | **PUBLISHER:** ROGUE BRAINS | **DEVELOPER:** ROGUE BRAINS



On the other side of the border, in Philadelphia, a wrestling company called CHIKARA is not altogether unfamiliar with lucha libre. Company founder and owner Mike Quackenbush openly defines the wrestling style as being a "family-friendly take on Mexican lucha libre that plays like a comic book come to life." It's not wholly surprising, then, that their first voyage into videogames is an arcade-style beat-'em-up in the vein of *X-Men* or *Captain America and the Avengers.*

Titled *Rudo Resurrection,* the game revolves around perennial CHIKARA malcontent and rudo (villain) puppet master UltraMantis Black. Said antagonist has a problem with the Bruderschaft Des Kreuzes (BDK), a group that's antagonizing all of CHIKARA in an effort to take



Immediately, it's obvious *Ring* isn't the standard wrestling game. Characters and arenas are bright and vibrant, with an aesthetic somewhere between gaudy and tacky. The fighters aren't the typical bruisers, looking more like they came out of a comic book than a neighborhood gym. Branding from Mexican companies helps fill out the game's arenas, and colorful stadiums filled with pulsing crowds help complete the picture.

The masked grappler is iconic of Mexico's wrestling heritage, and it shows in *Ring*. Starting from the very beginning, character creation centers on making a unique mask. From the basic head covering, the game gives options for different eye, nose, and mouth openings as well as a handful of adornments. Beyond that, the game also features customization for the stitching and borders of each attachment. The in-game editor is robust enough that we were able to create a fairly convincing Sonic the Hedgehog mask.

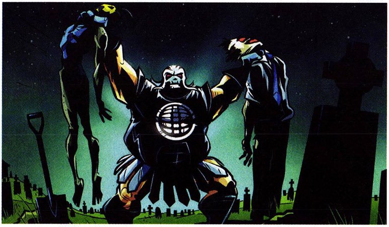
Ring's online play further emphasizes the mysterious masked man. There are separate lobbies for unranked matches, ranked matches, and the infamous mask mode—which is targeted specifically toward hardcore players. However, all's not lost when a mask is removed. After a handful of ranked matches, players get the chance to make a new mask. So it's not as severe as real-life lucha libre; this is a game, after all.

Ring's story mode, on the other hand, is a bit simple compared to its contemporaries. Unlike other wrestling games that prioritize branching storylines, *Ring* pushes forth with a basic win-to-advance mode. "The main thing we're looking to do is to deliver a fun gameplay experience," Beyer says, as both he and lead programmer Jason Steel acknowledge the streamlined nature of the title. "Other titles can become monolithic and add on every feature and customizable option," Steel says, "but I don't think that they really address the gameplay."

After a couple of rounds of in-ring experience, we comprehend their simple fun mantra. Controls are mapped smartly to the DualShock's face buttons, making *Ring* easy to pick up and play. Before long, we were running about the ring and throwing down the awesome acrobatics that are lucha libre's hallmark.

Ring features other ways to draw in new players. Animations are crisp but exaggerated. A haymaker punch becomes a whole body affair, having the executor almost literally throwing his fist's weight into an opponent. More advanced moves, like a head-scissors takedown, can lead to an opponent flying through the air. Such flourishes are seen throughout, reinforcing the notion the men in the ring are actual superheroes and villains.

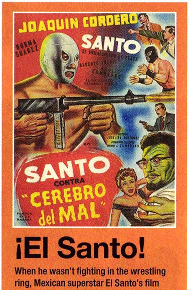
For the more experienced player, *Ring* features well-implemented reversals. Typical for the genre, the game offers ways to counter all types of attacks. A well-timed button press can defeat a strike or a grapple, but more complicated scenarios arise with pins or submissions. Button-mashing comes into play, naturally, but depending on the momentum of the match, the time required for a break can vary. The button needing to be pressed can vary randomly during the break attempt as well. It all comes back to the simple to learn, difficult to master feel of the game.



control. Black uses magic to resurrect deceased wrestlers, stealing life-force from the company's tecnicos (heroes), but his spell fails and gives control of the zombies to the BDK. In the wake of this mess is The Colony, a trio of masked wrestlers whose characters, in a rather insane bit, are uncommonly antlike. Their mission in the game is, naturally, to battle through the villains. As they make progress, tecnicos will gain their life-force back and become playable.

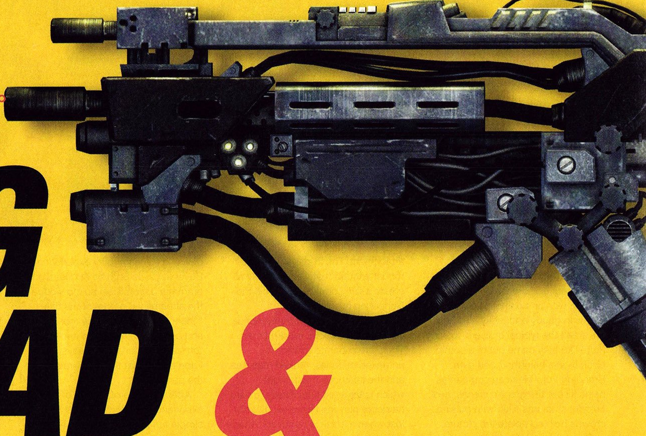
The strengths of CHIKARA seem to be, in no particular order: barking insanity and unrestrained creativity. In the last year alone, CHIKARA has seen a wealth of wrestlers perform elements that seem ripped straight from a videogame. There stands the literal videogame reference in Super Smash Bros., a tag team whose tights have featured working (to comedic effect) Nintendo Entertainment System controllers. Also featured are The Osirian Portal, which includes a self-described funky pharaoh and a walking, talking cobra. Most notably, though, is the Order of the Neo-Solar Temple: a group that obtained a mind-controlling artifact and used it to great success until it was realized the artifact carried a specific curse. This storyline, in specific, leads directly into *Rudo Resurrection,* as it introduced the BDK.

The game was announced at the company's annual King of Trios event—fitting, as gameplay will revolve around wrestling trios, a concept central to CHIKARA. ■



¡El Santo!

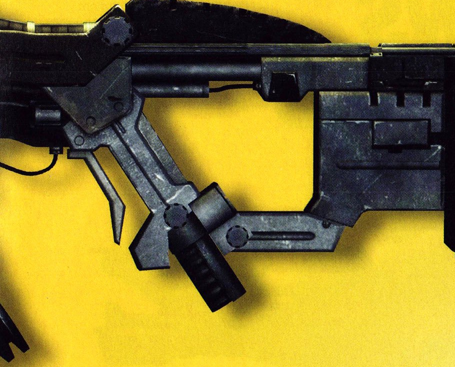
When he wasn't fighting in the wrestling ring, Mexican superstar El Santo's film career saw him saving the world on a regular basis. Operating out of a cave and driving around in a convertible, much like Batman at the time, El Santo took on Martians, zombies, vampires, and werewolves. Oftentimes, the films would find their way into a wrestling ring—including one such time when El Santo unmasked a normal wrestler to reveal a dangerous werewolf.



We all love big guns because we love to shoot big things. It's only natural.

BIG BAD & DANGE

Considering what Umbrella Corp. unleashed on the world, the oil companies don't seem all that bad.



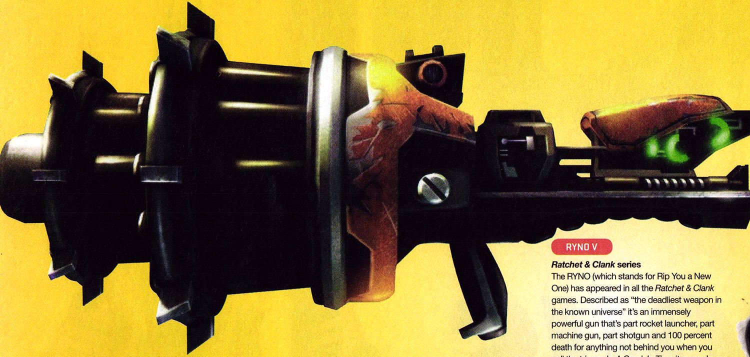
The French call them *femmes fatales.* We call them the crazy neighbor lady who comes home very late at night. Don't piss them off.

ROUS

All the things we love to love and love to hate about games right here in one spot. And lots of it.

BIG GUNS & BIG FATTIES

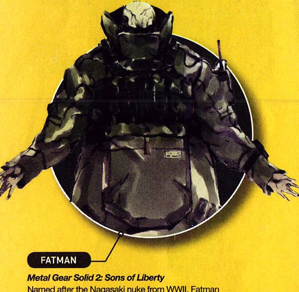
Despite what the NRA might tell us, **guns *do* kill people**—and these are tops at getting the job done. **And don't call these fellas big-boned.** These plus-sized porkers will squash anyone who gets in their way.



RYNO V

***Ratchet & Clank* series**

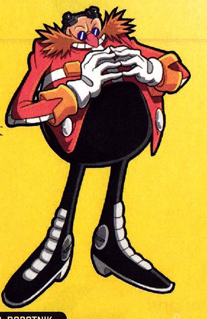
The RYNO (which stands for Rip You a New One) has appeared in all the *Ratchet & Clank* games. Described as "the deadliest weapon in the known universe" it's an immensely powerful gun that's part rocket launcher, part machine gun, part shotgun and 100 percent death for anything not behind you when you pull the trigger. In *A Crack In Time* it even plays the 1812 Overture when you fire it. Classy.



FATMAN

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty

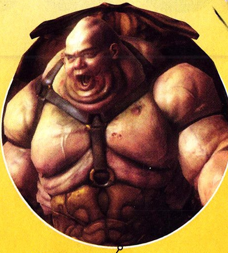
Named after the Nagasaki nuke from WWII, Fatman is a mess of contradictions. Capable of building hugely destructive bombs, he considers his work art, and keeps the tools of his craft—his hands—baby soft and manicured. Then there are the inline skates that are in no way practical for: A) a man built like a chunky bald bear, and B) someone who plays with explosives. He built an atomic bomb at age 10, although he apparently got stupider with age as all his bombs in *MGS2* can be disarmed by freezing. He was hired by the Patriots to test Raiden as part of the Solid Snake Simulation program—an attempt to recreate *MGS's* Shadow Moses incident and use the data to build an army of Snake clones.



DR. ROBOTNIK

***Sonic the Hedgehog* series**

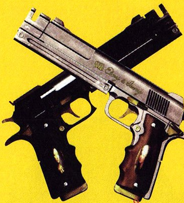
How can a man who works so hard put on so much weight? Dr. Robotnik was the end boss for essentially every level in every *Sonic* game for most of the '90s. That said, he did spend most of his time in mechs so he probably wasn't feeling the burn as he pushed buttons and laughed. Known as Dr. Eggman in Japan, he's a robotics expert with a 300 IQ and was originally created as a potential mascot for Sega. He lost and became Sonic's enemy. Bar-bet fact: he's a caricature of President Teddy Roosevelt.



ROACH

Heavenly Sword

You've got to feel sorry for Roach. Not only does he look like 600 pounds of melting wax but his father hates him and he gets beat by a girl. He's actually chief bad guy King Bohan's illegitimate son—but despite being his father, Bohan abuses him constantly, leaving Roach with only his pets for company. Admittedly, they are armored fighting monkeys but when you're that lonely even an orangutan in a helmet can seem like a friend. He's one of the few bosses in *Heavenly Sword* that Nariko doesn't fatally impale, making his blundering attempts to kill her and his dad's contempt at failure even more tragic. You feel sorry for him, like the fat kid at the local playground who wants to join in a game of hoops. Except, instead of trying to score a basket he's trying to murder daddy's magically powered and incredibly foxy enemy. It's a rough neighborhood.



BULLSEYE

(see pgs. 62-63)

***Resistance* series**

Essentially a homing machine gun, the Chimeran Bullseye can fire a "tag" shot that will then cause every other bullet to zero-in on the first round. Great if you clip a Chimera as you can then watch streams of bullets curve through the air and pepper the enemy wherever they hide. Get on the other end of it in multiplayer though, and you're history—unless you can dislodge the tag by frantically shaking the controller. The basic Bullseye fires orange bullets, while the more lethal Bullseye Mk. II fires blue ammo.

M4A1 CARBINE

Metal Gear Solid 4, Uncharted* series, and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

A favorite of *Metal Gear's* Snake, Nathan Drake from *Uncharted,* and a *Modern Warfare 2* essential, this is a full-auto variant of the M4 assault rifle. Its popularity comes from the flexibility of the Special Operations Peculiar Modification, or SOPMOD, kit. This system lets you bolt just about anything you want to the rifle, including extra grips, suppressors, grenade launchers, plus ACOG, reflex, and laser sights. It's about the only gun you'll ever need.

EBONY AND IVORY

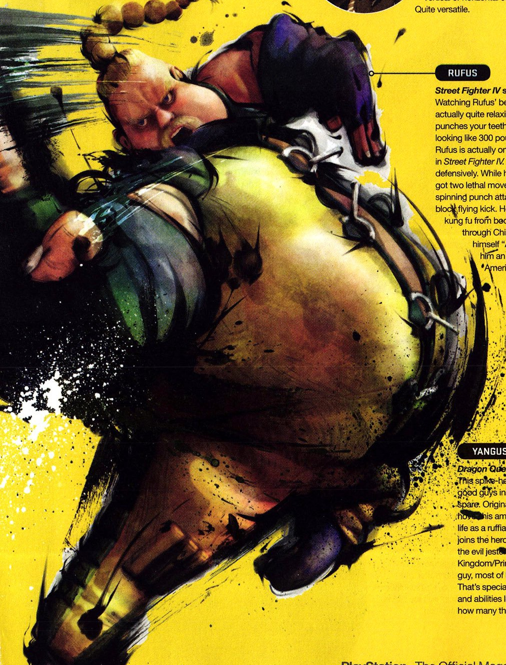
***Devil May Cry* series**

If you're going demon killing then you'd best get tooled up. Dante's custom pistols are loosely based on M1911 .45 handguns. These ones, however, were heavily customized by master gunsmith Nell Goldstein and bare the inscription "For Tony Redgrave By .45 Art Warks." Tony Redgrave being one of Dante's aliases while "warks" is an in-joke between the pair referring to Goldstein's misspelt shop sign. Ebony is designed for long distance targeting while Ivory is built for rapid fire. It's also a complete mirror image of its twin, with slide, ejection port, and controls all left-handed.

211-V PLASMA CUTTER

***Dead Space* series**

Possibly the only gun on these pages with Black & Decker printed on the barrel. The 211-V is actually a mining tool used for cutting rocks. However, when engineer Isaac encounters undead alien necromorphs on the doomed *USG Ishimura* he finds its cutting abilities handy to prune the flailing limbs of the monsters pursuing him. It fires lethal slicing blasts of energy and its barrel can be rotated for vertical or horizontal cuts. Quite versatile.



RUFUS

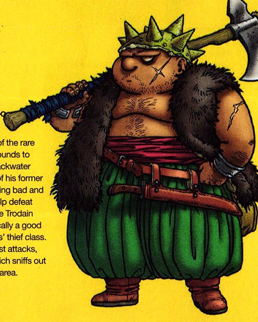
***Street Fighter IV* series**

Watching Rufus' belly gently undulate before a match is actually quite relaxing...right up to the point where he punches your teeth out of the back of your neck. Despite looking like 300 pounds of jelly poured into a unitard, Rufus is actually one of the most dangerous combatants in *Street Fighter IV.* He fights well both offensively and defensively. While he hasn't got a projectile attack, he's got two lethal moves: the Galactic Tornado, a fast, spinning punch attack, and the Messiah Kick, a tricky-to-block flying kick. He's got a fat head too. Despite learning kung fu from books, movies, and a brief road trip through China to hone his technique, he's declared himself "America's Greatest Fighter"—making him an instant rival of Ken who, you know, is America's Greatest Fighter.

YANGUS

Dragon Quest VIII

This spike-headed blubber-butt is one of the rare good guys in games with a few extra pounds to spare. Originally a bandit thief from a backwater hovel, his ample body bears the scars of his former life as a ruffian. He turns his back on being bad and joins the hero in *Dragon Quest VIII* to help defeat the evil jester Dhoulmagus, and save the Trodain Kingdom/Princess/etc. While he's basically a good guy, most of his skills are from the series' thief class. That's specializing in axes, clubs, and fist attacks, and abilities like "nose for treasure," which sniffs out how many things there are to find in an area.



BAD COMPANY

Whether they're constantly getting kidnapped or butting in with lousy one-liners, these **lame characters** irritate us like none other.

DAXTER

Daxter

Half otter, half weasel, all utterly hateful "comedy" relief. As an annoying sidekick in the *Jak* games he's just about bearable. (Well, if we stick our fingers in our ears and hum loudly whenever he opens his furry maw.) But the moment he gets his own PSP spin-off, the hate gets cranked up to a level we can only imagine being topped by a joint Jar Jar Binks/ Ewoks stand-up act. With a mouth the size of the Lincoln tunnel and comedic quips as funny as syphilis, Daxter is one of the most painful, obnoxious PlayStation characters ever.

RAIDEN

Metal Gear Solid 2

Despite what his defenders may say, Raiden is not the Luke Skywalker to Solid Snake's Han Solo. He's more like the prequels' rubbish Jedi kids to Snake's suave space pilot. Whiny, effeminate, and overly emotional, this covert government agent would rather waste time chatting with his girlfriend than complete the trivial job of saving the president. All right, so he might singlehandedly take down a terrorist cell and prevent a shady organization from destroying the Internet. But that still doesn't excuse his hours of moody moaning.

ASHLEY GRAHAM

Resident Evil 4

Officially the most kidnapped character in the history of games—seriously—Miss Graham gets lifted by *Resident Evil 4's* evil Los Illuminados cult *114* times. If we're not having to rescue her from hooded men who want to shove parasites down her throat, we're having to sneak past monsters as we control her in annoying puzzle sections. She may be the president's daughter, but it's clear the leader of the free world didn't spend much on her education. Dim-witted, shrill, and forever asking stupid questions, Ashley is lucky Leon didn't toss her to those chainsaw-wielding nutters for the decapitation she deserves.

ZEKE

inFamous

Hurray! Just what *inFamous* needs: a hefty dollop of useless, irritating sidekick. Not only is Zeke completely worthless when it comes to helping Cole battle the forces of evil, but he's also a self-absorbed greedy so-and-so. Despite the fact Empire City is in ruins with thousands of people starving, Zeke has no problem constantly stuffing his bloated belly. Being greedy we can forgive, but screwing his best friend over because he's jealous of his superpowers? Yeah, not so much. An unfunny traitor who does nothing but get in the way, his redemption during the game's finale comes way too late to restore this idiot's risible reputation.

& BAD COMPANIES

Everyone hates The Man. But when it comes to games, the **evil corporations** pulling the strings make credit-default swaps seem like a good idea.

SHINRA ELECTRIC POWER COMPANY

Final Fantasy VII
WHO ARE THEY? Shinra provides electricity to all of Gaia, and acts as its de facto government. Their enormous Mako reactors litter the landscape, and they're also involved in space exploration.
WHY ARE THEY EVIL? As well as controlling the populace with fear, the Mako energy they're draining is slowly killing the planet. But profit is everything, and they don't care, using aggression to silence any opposition.

RYAN INDUSTRIES

RYAN INDUSTRIES

BioShock
WHO ARE THEY? Founded by entrepreneur Andrew Ryan, this steel company made him the youngest billionaire in the world. He then used its considerable capital to build Rapture, an underwater city and haven for the world's greatest minds.
WHY ARE THEY EVIL? The power went to Ryan's head and he became a nefarious tyrant, monopolizing industry in Rapture. He even started charging for *oxygen* and would aggressively suppress any attempts to question his rule.

VAULT-TEC INDUSTRIES

Fallout 3
WHO ARE THEY? With the war between China and America escalating, Vault-Tec built vast underground bunkers—known as Vaults—to shelter citizens concerned about the devastation of nuclear war, should it break out.
WHY ARE THEY EVIL? Rather than a public service, the Vaults were part of the Societal Preservation Program, a secret experiment to study the effects of isolation. They also used the Vaults to develop the Forced Evolutionary Virus and create an army of super soldiers.

WEYLAND-YUTANI CORP
BUILDING BETTER WORLDS

WEYLAND-YUTANI

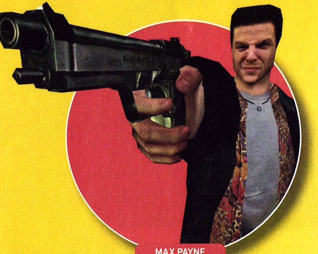
Aliens vs. Predator
WHO ARE THEY? In the *Alien* universe, these guys run everything—from deep-space mining and colonization to manufacturing weapons for the military. Their founder is Charles Bishop Weyland, played by Lance Henriksen, who has appeared in every *Alien* film, and Sega's *AVP* game.
WHY ARE THEY EVIL? They'll stop at nothing to make a profit. Rather than contain or destroy the Xenomorphs, the company wanted to secretly capture a live sample and develop it into a biological weapon. Of course, they're also interested in the Predators; specifically, their advanced technology.

UMBRELLA CORPORATION

***Resident Evil* series**
WHO ARE THEY? As far as the world is concerned, Umbrella is a pharmaceutical company. They're the biggest corporation in the *Resident Evil* universe, with offices in every corner of the globe, but their base is in Raccoon City.
WHY ARE THEY EVIL? Because, secretly, they're developing viruses that can turn human beings and animals into living bio-weapons. They also have a ruthless paramilitary army to defend their secrets.

DANGEROUS LADIES & ANGRY MEN

These **femmes fatales** are tempting, yes. But they won't just kill you. They'll betray you, deceive you, even eat you. Even on our worst days, we're not nearly as dangerous as these rage-aholics. **As for the fellas here,** they don't bottle up then explode; they explode, smash the bottle against the wall, then go for your neck with it.

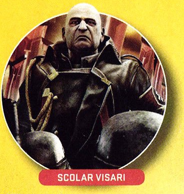


MAX PAYNE

***Maxy Payne* series**

WHY'S HE SO ANGRY? His wife and baby daughter were murdered by a shadowy government agency, his friend was killed, he was framed for the murder, an assassin was hired to kill him, and another friend betrayed him. He's basically having a really bad time and, with a third game announced, the end doesn't seem to be in sight.

ANGRIEST MOMENTS: Max does what any man in his position would do—declares a one-man war on the Mafia, the Russian mob, the U.S. government and The Illuminati, an underground society that secretly rules the world. And thanks to an uncanny ability to dodge bullets in slow-motion he actually ends up winning. Doesn't calm him down, though.

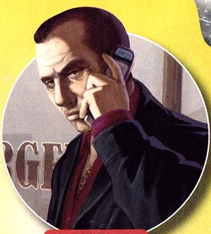


SCOLAR VISARI

***Killzone* series**

WHY SO ANGRY? After years of ISA domination, Visari snaps and stirs up the Helghan's patriotic fury. They pledge to take back Vekta from the ISA thieves and build an enormous army. An army that forms the basis of both *Killzone* games.

ANGRIEST MOMENTS: Rather than discuss things diplomatically, Visari gives a stirring speech and orders a full-scale invasion of Vekta. And we don't really blame him—in the game's murky past the ISA basically stole Vekta from a weakened Helghast. His powerful, fiery speeches fill the Helghans with passion and a thirst for vengeance—a bit like an infamous German fella did in the '40s. He was definitely wrong though. Really wrong.

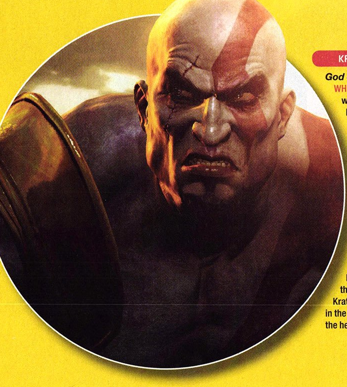


MIKHAIL FAUSTIN

Grand Theft Auto 4

WHY SO ANGRY? A spell in a Siberian prison camp turned Faustin into a hard-nosed, tattooed bastard. He moved to Liberty City to make his fortune and developed a ruinous coke habit in the process. His utter contempt for everything and everyone around him is most evident in the way he treats his daughter. "I don't care about her happiness," he explains to Niko. "All I care about is discipline and respect."

ANGRIEST MOMENTS: Too much boozing and drug abuse has given Faustin a brutally short temper. During the course of the game he murders his henchman Andrei Utraniyev (for being noisy) and orders the killing of Lenny Petrovic—son of the city's most powerful Russian gangster.

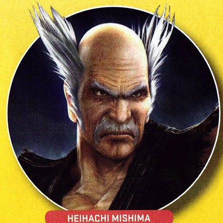


KRATOS

***God of War* series**

WHY SO ANGRY? Like Max Payne he lost his wife and kid—only he was the one who killed them. It's never really clear why, though. At the behest of Ares he leads his army into a village, razes it to the ground and murders everyone, only realizing at the last minute that the final two bodies were those of his family. Oops.

ANGRIEST MOMENTS: Swears vengeance on Ares and spends the best part of the first game hunting him down. He finally defeats him using Pandora's Box and becomes the next God of War. In his quest he slaughters thousands of mythical beasts, rips off heads, tears out eyes, throws people off cliffs—if it's violent, Kratos has probably had fun doing it. And in the third game he gets *so* mad he tears the head off a god.



HEIHACHI MISHIMA

***Tekken* series, *Soulcalibur* series**

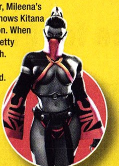
WHY'S HE SO ANGRY? Most of Heihachi's rage stems from his son, Kazuya. To eliminate weakness, Heihachi threw the boy down a ravine, claiming that he'd survive if he were truly his son. Kazuya did survive, so Heihachi adopted a Chinese son, Lee, to spite him and trained him to be Kazuya's rival. What an *a-hole.*

ANGRIEST MOMENTS: Besides punching a lot of people in the *Tekken* series and *Soulcalibur II,* Heihachi tried to combine his DNA with the ancient demon Ogre, threw his son down another pit (this time a *volcano)* and created his own army called the Tekken Force. In *Tekken 6* he even kicked his son out of a space shuttle, but ended up lost in space with his progeny.

MILEENA

***Mortal Kombat* series**

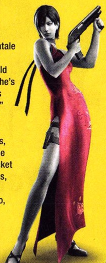
Don't get your hopes up, even if you've got a thing for brunettes in combat bikinis. She might look hot, but there's a slight problem; she's *pure evil*. Mileena is a magical clone of Princess Kitana, created for Shao Kahn to watch over his do-gooder adopted daughter. She's also half-Tarkatan, *MK's* fang-faced monster breed, so lift up that veil and you'll find a face like a fistful of nails. However, Mileena's ending in *MK: Armageddon* shows Kitana and her fusing into one person. When they split, Mileena has the pretty face and Kitana gets the teeth. Mileena then locks her in a dungeon where she goes mad. See? *Evil*.



ADA WONG

Resident Evil 4

Technically, Ada's a terrible femme fatale because if it wasn't for her actions in *Resident Evil 4,* Leon S. Kennedy would have been dead several times over. She's sent in to retrieve a sample of the Las Plagas parasite for the "Organization" while pretending to work for Wesker, pitching herself in opposition to Leon in the process. Despite being enemies, she still manages to save him from the Las Plagas infection, give him the rocket launcher he needs to kill the final boss, and throw him the keys to a jet ski so he can escape an exploding island. So, enemy? Fail. Slinky red dress? Win.



BLOODRAYNE

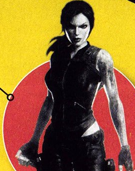
Bloodrayne

You're looking at the first ever videogame character to go topless in *Playboy.* Mother would definitely not approve. She also appears in the Uwe Boll film of the same name, which no one approved of. Even getting ex-Terminator Kristanna Loken to fill the leather cat suit didn't help. Bloodrayne's a Dhampir, which is what you get when a daddy vampire loves a human mummy very much. Her father, Kagan, had some strict parenting polices built around killing Bloodrayne's entire family, which left her with a grudge against vamps and she hunts them the world over to get at her dad. Eventually she was recruited by the Brimstone Society, a supernatural police force that soon had her preventing occult Nazis, and then Kagan's remaining brood, from taking over the world.

EVIL LARA CROFT

Tomb Raider: Underworld

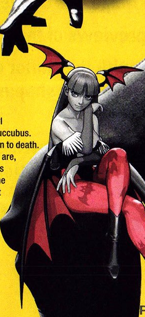
Lara's good, let's make that clear. But she does have two evil twins. The first is a partial clone who appears in *Anniversary.* She's an exact copy apart from a lack of skin, leading to fans calling her Bacon Lara. She copies Lara's every move, making for a tough boss battle until you maneuver her into a lava pit. The second appears in *Underworld* and, thankfully, has skin. She's prettier but evil, as she proves by destroying Croft Manor and killing Lara's friend, Alister. Fans call her Doppelhoe.



MORRIGAN AENSLAND

***Darkstalkers* series**

Before you get too excited at the college girl Halloween costume, bear in mind she's a succubus. That's a kind of demon that likes sexing men to death. And no matter how adorable those bat ears are, she's not worth dying for. Probably. She was adopted by the demon Belial, who took some of her power for himself and sealed the rest in a secret dimension where it became another hot vampire girl called Lilith. Unknowingly stripped of her powers, Morrigan spends her time visiting the human realm for kicks, mainly getting into fights in *Darkstalkers,* which is basically *Street Fighter* with monsters.



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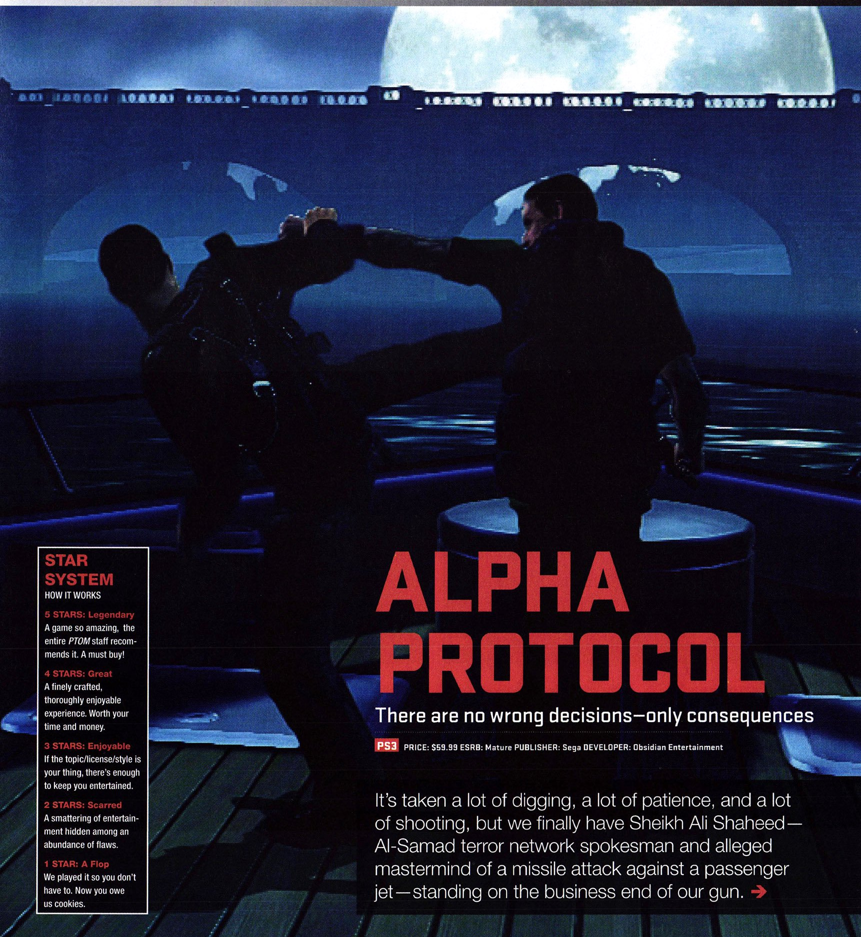


ALPHA PROTOCOL

There are no wrong decisions—only consequences

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** Sega **DEVELOPER:** Obsidian Entertainment

It's taken a lot of digging, a lot of patience, and a lot of shooting, but we finally have Sheikh Ali Shaheed—Al-Samad terror network spokesman and alleged mastermind of a missile attack against a passenger jet—standing on the business end of our gun. →

STAR SYSTEM

HOW IT WORKS

5 STARS: Legendary
A game so amazing, the entire *PTOM* staff recommends it. A must buy!

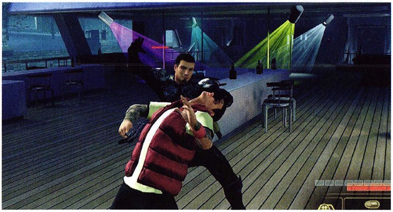
4 STARS: Great
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

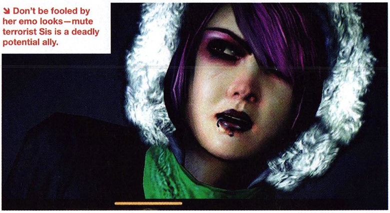
3 STARS: Enjoyable
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

2 STARS: Scarred
A smattering of entertainment hidden among an abundance of flaws.

1 STAR: A Flop
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

↖ Sometimes the key to diplomacy is but a mere size-12 boot away.





↘ Don't be fooled by her emo looks—mute terrorist Sis is a deadly potential ally.

➔ It wasn't easy getting to this point. We've had to infiltrate terror camps, gun down his steroid-hulk bodyguard and crack open a Stryker assault vehicle with several disposable rocket launchers. Now that he's helpless, though, he taunts us. He tells us that we're carrying out the twisted whims of a shadowy defense contractor, and that he's been secretly doing the same all along. And if we just let him go, he says, he can give us proof.

The choice is clear: Arrest him, let him go and risk further attacks, or introduce him, face-first, to the rocks below the bridge we're standing on. Whatever we do, we need to make up our minds quickly—the direction the rest of the game takes could hinge on our answer.

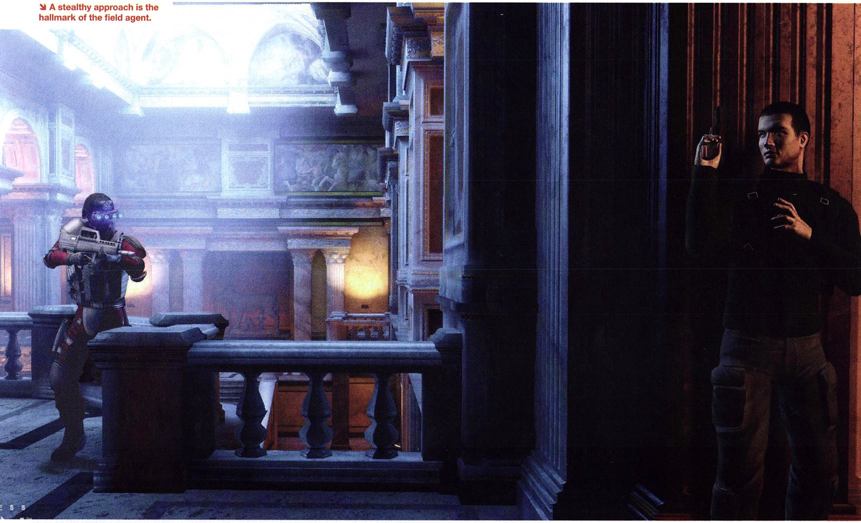
Pro Choice

Kill or spare, sacrifice one to save hundreds: *Alpha Protocol's* best moments come from decisions like this. In every mission we undertake, we're faced with potentially game-altering life-or-death choices that can determine who our friends are, give us an advantage over enemies, and change how the story unfolds. Ultimately, they'll also come to define just who *Alpha Protocol's* embattled hero, Agent Michael Thorton, really is.

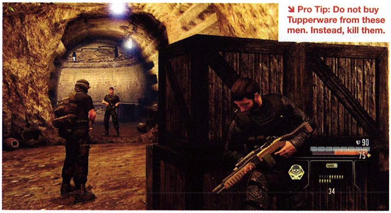
Who he is, on the surface at least, is a rogue agent working with Alpha Protocol, a spy agency so super-secret it doesn't officially exist. Beginning as an elite field agent, Thorton is sent to Saudi Arabia to hunt down and kill Sheikh Shaheed, and to find a stolen cache of high-tech missiles that were used to shoot down an airliner. But as so often happens in spy adventures, things quickly get complicated.

Before long, Thorton is dashing to hotspots around the world, taking on terrorists, secret police, and criminals in a bid to thwart a corporation planning to profit from starting World War III. Interestingly, only a few parts of the game are really "fixed" in the game's plot progression; for much of the game, Thorton can travel more or less freely among its three central locations (Rome, Moscow, and Taipei) and pursue missions in each as players see fit.

Players have some leeway to customize Thorton right from the



↘ A stealthy approach is the hallmark of the field agent.

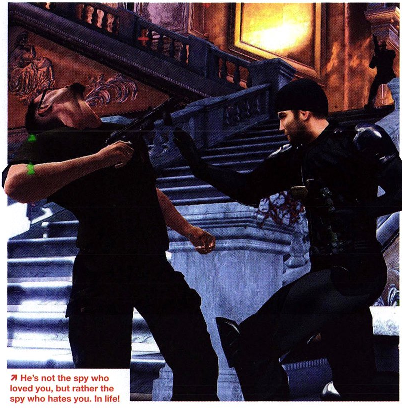


↘ Pro Tip: Do not buy Tupperware from these men. Instead, kill them.

start, although not as much as might be expected from a typical RPG. There are five initial agent types to choose from: field agent, soldier, tech specialist, freelancer, or recruit. Each of these is suited to a different playstyle; for example, those who want an edge in sneaking should select field agent (and, later, the spy specialization), while the tech specialist can more quickly access better gadgets, and the soldier specializes in unbridled violence.

It's also possible to alter Thorton's appearance, but only so far as new facial hair, hats, and glasses—those hoping for more detailed character-creation, as in *Mass Effect* or *Dragon Age: Origins,* will be disappointed. In fact, don't hope for much in the way of a role-playing game at all; *Protocol* has been *labeled* an RPG, but it's really more of a stealth-shooter with RPG elements and a strong, branching story. A sizable chunk of the game is spent cultivating new allies and assigning points to new abilities when Thorton levels up, but mostly he'll be shooting, sneaking, and punching his way through terrorist dens and besieged public places around the world.

> “We need to make up our minds quickly—the direction the game takes could hinge on our answer.”



↗ He's not the spy who loved you, but rather the spy who hates you. In life!

↘ Choice Decisions

The Sheikh Shaheed dilemma is just one of many that players face throughout *Alpha Protocol*. Some choices are more difficult than others, and all have consequences as to how the plot unfolds.

TO KILL OR NOT TO KILL
Shooting a villain in cold blood might seem like an obvious choice, but letting him live can yield rewards. Killing or arresting Shaheed will destabilize his terror network, but if we'd let him live, we could have gotten further evidence out of him and also compliance and even help from his soldiers.

DEEDS NOT WORDS
A Michael Thorton who storms through missions murdering everyone will provoke different reactions from characters than one who knocks out guards and spares his enemies. Other times, it's the missions that matter; miss out on one, and you might never encounter certain major characters or events.

TALK IT OUT
The vast majority of Thorton's choices are made through conversation where, instead of a more traditional dialogue tree, players are presented with a timed menu with three different "stances." These usually (but not always) amount to professional, suave, and aggressive, each yielding different results from different people.

SPLIT PERSONALITY
Once it's clear which stance works best on a given character, it's easy to continue using that stance to earn his trust, or to suddenly employ an opposite approach to throw him off his game. Surprisingly, getting a contact to hate Thorton can sometimes be just as beneficial as winning his love.

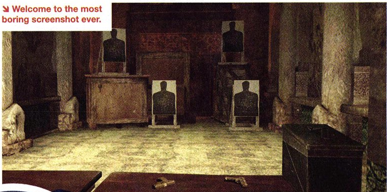
Off the Mark

That's actually *Alpha Protocol's* problem, because if one were to strip away the split-second choices and RPG elements (which aren't integrated as smoothly into the action as, say, *Mass Effect's),* all that would be left is an uneven, even mediocre shooter. The sticky-cover system and blind-firing option are okay, and the grenades and traps are fun to play around with, especially once they've been upgraded a bit (along with Thorton's skills at handling them). And the *real* fun comes from using Thorton's leveled-up spy powers, which let him do things such as temporarily turn invisible (and instantly kill/knock-out multiple enemies in front of their comrades), go into a bullet-time martial-arts frenzy, automatically detect the positions of all nearby enemies, or simply line up shots with perfect precision.

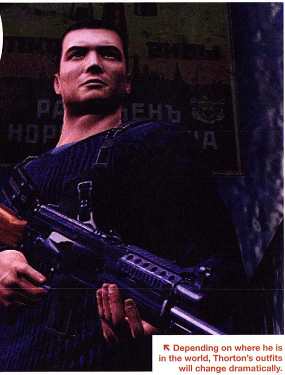
But these powers take a while to unlock. In the meantime, the shooting feels clumsy and stiff, and the RPG elements make the game *worse.* Trying to shoot a gun Thorton isn't proficient with, for example, means that even when players *think* they've lined up a perfect shot, it's likely to miss and set off an alert. Likewise, trying to sneak around with a low stealth rating creates more noise than players expect.

At that, the game tends to reward a more commando-style approach over stealth.

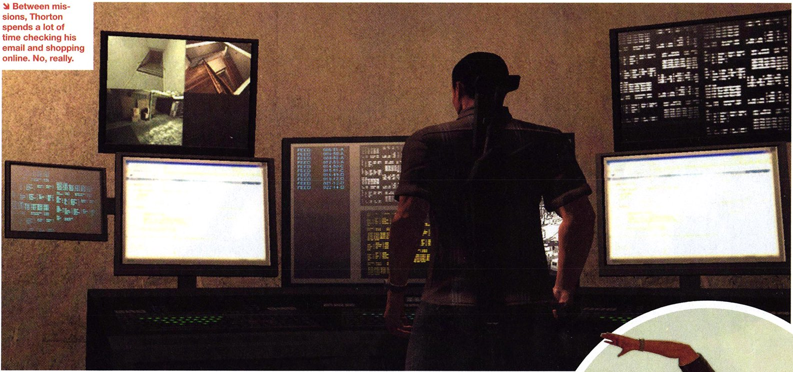
↘ Welcome to the most boring screenshot ever.



↖ As President Theodore Roosevelt noted, "Speak softly and carry a big stick."



↖ Depending on where he is in the world, Thorton's outfits will change dramatically.



Between missions, Thorton spends a lot of time checking his email and shopping online. No, really.

> **“Shooting terrorists is far from the only draw here—*Protocol’s* story is, with its branching paths and weighty decisions, at times deeply engaging.”**

Thorton’s regenerating “endurance” shield and ability to take a pounding means cutting down enemies with a shotgun at close range, or even just running up and clubbing them, is a hell of a lot faster and easier than trying to stay out of sight to pop them with a silenced pistol. Add in a few boss fights verging on ridiculously tough and unfair (especially for stealth players), with frequently excruciating lockpicking and hacking minigames, and approaching the game methodically turns it into a difficult slog.

Making matters worse, *Protocol* is not a particularly pretty game; it took us a while to get acclimated to the stiff character animations and their weird facial expressions. It’s also surprisingly buggy, and the only reason we got through one of the boss fights was because our enemy somehow fell into a pit underneath an impenetrable grating, letting us sit back and shoot him like a fish in a barrel.

Once we’d been playing for a while and knew what we were doing (and, more importantly, had leveled Thorton up considerably), the action got a lot more fun. To be fair, shooting terrorists is far from the only draw here, and *Protocol’s* story is, with its branching paths and weighty decisions, replayable and, at times, deeply engaging—and it’s backed up by impressive writing and voice acting. We just wish the gameplay itself were more enjoyable. | Mikel Reparaz

Rating ★★★⯪☆

Guns don’t kill people. Agent Michael Thorton kills people. With guns.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
»Fallout 3
»LittleBigPlanet
»Rock Band 2
THE BEST & WORST Family games
ALPHA PROTOCOL
Best RPG of '09—see it here first!
50+ IDEAL GIFTS FOR GAMERS

↑ Best *What* of *When*?

Sometimes, even PTOM makes mistakes, as with our Holiday 2008 cover, when we prematurely declared *Alpha Protocol* the best role-playing game for 2009. Not only did it not make it out last year, but even if it had, calling it the best RPG of ’09 (which also gave us *Demon’s Souls* and *Dragon Age: Origins*) would have verged on the criminal.

> There's no bigger game on PSP and no more varied game in the *Metal Gear* series.

METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER

Raw, radical Koj-enius in PSP's true *MGS3* sequel

PSP **PRICE:** $39.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Konami **DEVELOPER:** Kojima Productions

This is what happens when Hideo Kojima makes a game about *everything.* Freed from PS3 mega-budgets and the kind of management pressure that comes with building the game everyone bought a PS3 for, *Peace Walker* is every idea in Kojima's brain indiscriminately emptied onto a UMD.

Of course *Peace Walker* is the stealth action game we came to the party to play, but within a mission or two the game opens up like no *Metal Gear* before it. On the battlefield it's a *Pokémon* mission to catch and recruit as many soldiers for our army as possible. Off the battlefield it becomes a sports management and development game of sorts, where recruits are assigned to research new weapons, repair captured vehicles, and heal wounded teammates.

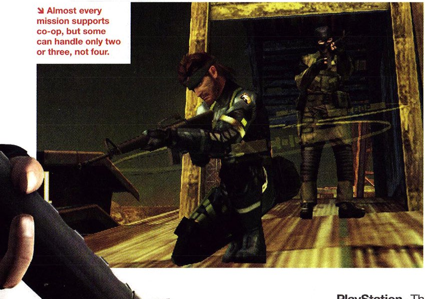
Further play reveals a rock-solid multiplayer shooter for up to eight people and a massive co-op stealth game for four. *Peace Walker* even had us building our own Metal Gear and sending men and machines out on missions in dedicated squads for dedicated jobs. Our army became stronger with every mission and if we lost a man, we recruited more—not just from Snake's campaign missions or the hundred Extra Ops bonus levels, but from any Wi-Fi hotspot. If we found ourselves with too many soldiers, we could even trade the surplus with friends or exchange them for weapons and items sent via Wi-Fi.

They're familiar ideas. *Peace Walker* takes the best bits from every *Metal Gear Solid* game—the recruitment tricks and base building from *Portable Ops,* the camouflage and multiplayer from *MGS3*: *Snake Eater,* the stripped-down controls from *Metal Gear Solid 4,* and the bonus missions and minigames from *VR Missions*—and brings them together for the first time. *Peace Walker* unites 10 games' worth of ideas in a Cold War setting that Kojima wallows in as if this is what *Metal Gear* would always have been if only his bosses had let him get on with the business of being utterly insane.

Old War

Following Big Boss in the years after the events of *Snake Eater* cost him an eye and a mentor, *Peace Walker* is all double-crosses and Cold War espionage. It's a time when Mutually Assured Destruction guarantees a world without war, but where questions about whether human fallibility might jeopardize the "mutual" part of the equation demand an answer. That answer is Peace Walker—a mobile nuke launcher that will retaliate without human intervention, and a mechanized monster that sinister types in both the U.S. and the USSR would see activated whether it's fired upon or not.

As in *Snake Eater, Peace Walker's* campaign is spent mostly in the jungle with occasional interludes in fortified enemy bases or on mountainsides, and as in *Snake Eater* it's a campaign spent hiding, using camouflage to

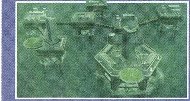


↘ Almost every mission supports co-op, but some can handle only two or three, not four.

↗ Solar systems live and die in the time it takes to kill the bosses.

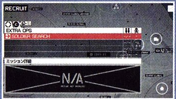
↓ *Peace Walker's* insane variety: revealed

Breaking down all the options



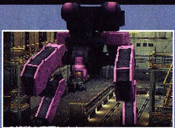
MOTHER BASE

Every action taken begins here. At first the Big Shell-style base is just a single platform off the coast of Costa Rica, but it quickly grows as the game progresses, adding new platforms and, with them, new ways to play.



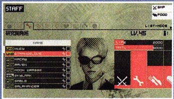
WI-FI RECRUITMENT

Set the PSP to seek out Wi-Fi signals and *Peace Walker* creates a new soldier that can be quickly recruited into a player's army. The "entrance exam" involves beating the living snot out of him on a rainy beach. He's indoctrinated after a takedown or two.



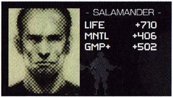
ZEKE

Metal Gear Zeke—shown here in stylish pink and missing its head—is the Mother Base's private Metal Gear. Every fight against an AI-controlled Peace Walker variant drops Metal Gear parts that can be used to construct the player's own machine.



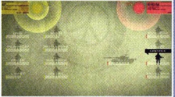
FIELD RECRUITS

The Fulton Recovery System enables plucking soldiers from the battlefield. Some will resist recruitment, others will need to wait in the hospital before they're useful. Even tanks and choppers can be signed up by beating them the right way.



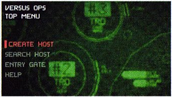
LEVELING UP

Peace Walker builds grinding into every aspect of the game. The more Snake fights with specific weapons, the more powerful those weapons become; the more missions his recruits go on—either on the battlefield or in Outer Ops—the stronger they'll grow.



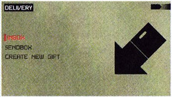
OUTER OPS

Peace Walker's mini-strategy game relies on careful squad selection…and luck. Send squads into battle and then take Snake on a mission or two before returning to the results. Success adds levels to your men; failure leads to injury and even death.



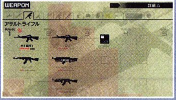
VERSUS OPS

Versus Ops is the adversarial multiplayer mode. It's not as sophisticated as *MGS4* or *Snake Eater*, but its four-on-four battles play out in distinctly *Metal Gear* fashion, with camouflage and stealth working surprisingly well on the PSP's small screen.



TRADING

Soldiers and items can be traded using a window showing all the men a player's offering and the men a friend has in exchange or by creating a gift box filled with guns and items. Set an "open on" date, then tune to play when they get the gift.

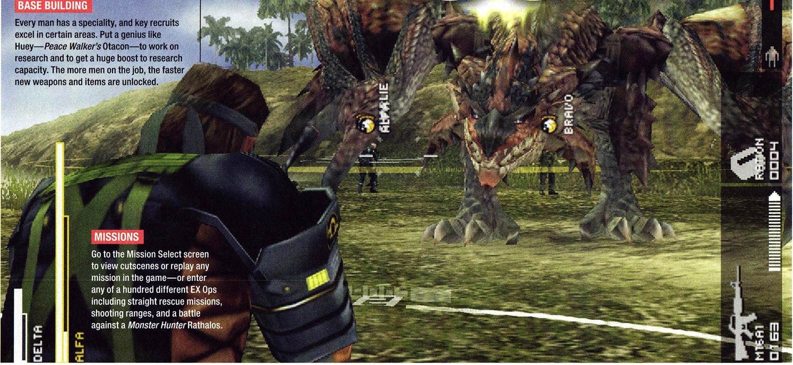


BASE BUILDING

Every man has a speciality, and key recruits excel in certain areas. Put a genius like Huey—*Peace Walker's* Otacon—to work on research and to get a huge boost to research capacity. The more men on the job, the faster new weapons and items are unlocked.

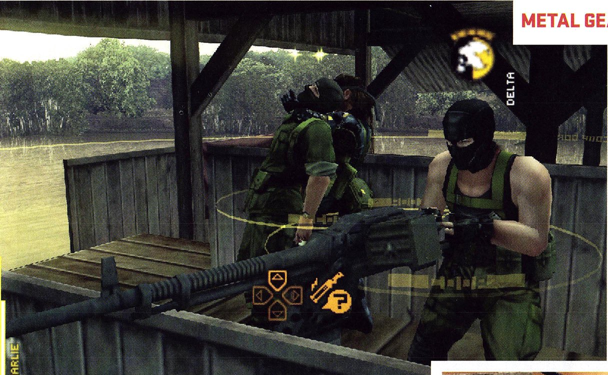
AND THE REST

Peace Walker is loaded with unlockables and extra features ranging from the traditional Tuxedo to dozens of individually voiced briefings on *Metal Gear* history to a logbook that chronologically tracks literally every player action taken in the game.

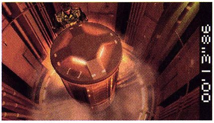


MISSIONS

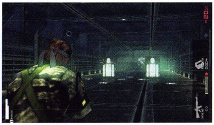
Go to the Mission Select screen to view cutscenes or replay any mission in the game—or enter any of a hundred different EX Ops including straight rescue missions, shooting ranges, and a battle against a *Monster Hunter* Rathalos.



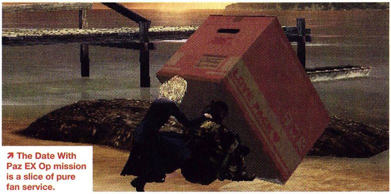
↑ *Peace Walker's* co-op works beautifully but the game sometimes feels more *Monster Hunter* than *Metal Gear Solid.*



↗ Every time we took down Peace Walker's AI, we could strip the core for parts.



↗ Shooting galleries aren't quite the pain we had expected from the PSP's controller.



↗ The Date With Paz EX Op mission is a slice of pure fan service.

blend in to the obscenely beautiful environments. It's a masterclass in pushing the PSP further than it ever wanted to go and sucking the battery dry at a frightening rate. And though the loading points were frequent and the levels kept short to make them handheld-friendly, there's no doubt that this is the world we know from *Snake Eater* or that *Peace Walker* is neither a sidestory nor cash-in, but a real and complete *Metal Gear* game.

Even after the campaign is over, *Peace Walker* keeps on giving. The boss battles and regular missions can be replayed alone or with friends to recruit new men, capture new hardware, and secure parts for Metal Gear Zeke (Big Boss's own walking tank), which extends the campaign even further once it's up and walking around. There are a hundred Extra Ops too, some recycling campaign maps with new enemies and objectives, and others creating new challenges in unique locations including a *Monster Hunter*-themed fight against a dragon and a decidedly shady "date" with not-nearly-legal-yet support character Paz Ortega.

Yet for the most part *Peace Walker* is curiously serious in a way other *Metal Gear*s aren't. There were no cola-chugging monkeys or Sixaxis-controlled breasts; only CIA spooks, Spetznaz bastards, and state of the art military hardware to fight in lieu of psychic soldiers or bosses made of bees. Those boss fights are *Peace Walker's* weakest moments. Alone, they're gruelling wars of attrition rather than tests of skill, climaxing with a fight against the Peace Walker itself that chewed up a full half hour of our time thanks to the fact it boasts a health bar longer than Andre the Giant's pant legs. They're fights clearly inspired by Capcom's PSP savior *Monster Hunter,* built for groups of friends more than individuals, but they can be trucked through alone with some brass balls and steely thumbs.

↙ It's huge and complex, but *still* doesn't work as well as the old-style handheld can opener.

Close Quarter Control

All of *Peace Walker*'s ideas would have been for naught if those steely thumbs rested on controls borrowed from *Portable Ops.* Kojima's last shot for the PSP was a digit-wrenching misery with more actions than should ever be shoehorned onto the portable unit's limited controlscape. *Peace Walker* fixes this by changing the buttons and by changing the game. First, the controls resemble *MGS4's* more western setup—aim with the left-shoulder button, fire with the right, camera control on the face buttons, and movement via the nub. It leaves few buttons free for *Metal Gear's* more elaborate sneakage, so *Peace Walker* doesn't bother trying. Crouching and running are possible, but not crawling; locking to cover is present but not moving while in cover; and there's close-quarter combat but enemies can only be dragged once downed.

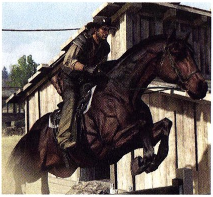
It all makes for a game that *works* the way a *Metal Gear* game should. It's also a setup we learned to live with very quickly. Those right-hand face buttons did betray us during the game's most intense action sequences, but this is the first handheld *Metal Gear* that *can have* intense action sequences—even if they're not as manic as the ones Kojima would throw at us if he had two analog nubs available.

Kojima's team did the best they could and it's more than good enough to call *Peace Walker* a genuine *Metal Gear Solid 5.* There's almost too much game here (there's no bigger game on PSP and no more varied game in the entire *Metal Gear* series). It's a technical showcase, sure, but *Peace Walker* is also a creative showcase that proves that nobody on Earth makes games like Hideo Kojima—because nobody else ever *could.* | Mike Gapper

Rating ★★★★☆

Redemption's gorgeous atmosphere is masterfully matched by the game's pitch-perfect soundtrack.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
★★★★★
Editors' Choice



RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Reach for the sky

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** Rockstar Games **DEVELOPER:** Rockstar San Diego, Rockstar North

Don't call it *Grand Theft Horses*. True, Rockstar's latest open-world masterpiece retains all the trademarks of one of its *Grand Theft Auto* games, but the overall experience feels remarkably different thanks in large part to its breathtaking world. *Red Dead Redemption* succeeds in creating an immersive and fully realized version of the Wild West, complete with everything we ever wanted from a Western: stagecoaches, six-shooters, saloons, even a bandana that players can equip to avoid losing honor when committing dirty deeds. The painstaking authenticity, gorgeous graphics, and attention to detail make for an engrossing experience.

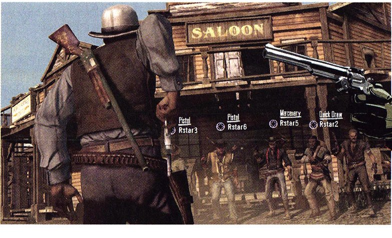
Even more impressive than the world's size is just how much there is to do in it. While galloping through *Redemption's* spectacular desert sandbox, players can help strangers on small but genuinely interesting side quests: aid local law enforcement in clearing enemy strongholds, track down wanted men, or just tackle ambient challenges such as treasure hunting. Not only did these activities (and many more) deepen our investment in the world, but each felt fun, rewarding, and worthwhile.

Since traversing the game world is more convenient than ever, players who prefer to stick to the story can do just that. The main campaign follows former outlaw John Marston as he attempts to capture his one-time partners and reclaim his family. At times Marston can feel one-dimensional and the setup—Marston must perform five or more missions for multiple characters before they finally help him—occasionally becomes irritating, but the narrative is still Shakespeare compared to most games.

As for the gameplay, the shooting feel smoother than ever thanks to the subtle auto-aim mechanics, and every bullet hits hard, with a satisfying burst of blood issuing from the target as he stumbles backward. Enemies are strong enough to pose an actual threat but can still be taken down easily enough so we feel like spur-clad badasses—especially after engaging the game's special slow-motion aiming system.

There are minor issues such as clunky character movement and lethal water hazards, but they're forgivable because *Redemption* managed to grip us in a way few games ever have. It's a fantastic epic adventure and a title that belongs in every gamer's library. | Scott Butterworth

Rating ★★★★★



← Multiplayer is nearly as phenomenal as the campaign. Grab some friends and roam the map as a gun-slinging posse.

➘ *Blur* offers all the thrills of the best kart racing games without the emasculating cartoon kiddie cars.

BLUR

Our insurance isn't going to cover this

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Everyone 10+ **PUBLISHER:** Activision **DEVELOPER:** Bizarre Creations

We're not thinking about the car. We're not thinking about the track. We're not even thinking about the race. We're thinking about survival—and playing *Street Fighter.*

Yes, that sounds strange, but spend some seat time with *Blur* and it won't. It's the rare driving game that doesn't require fixating on racing lines and driving technique. Instead, it's all about the competition and the unrelenting dance of attack and defense that frequently occurs for the duration of its races. As with *Street Fighter,* the game constantly challenges us to formulate strategies, execute tactics, and adapt on-the-fly.

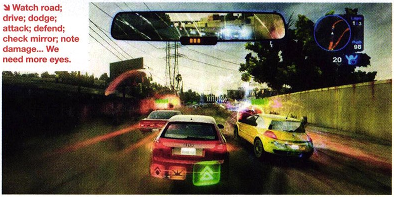
The key is the supremely balanced arsenal of powerups at our disposal. Back-of-the-pack pursuers would do well to acquire the homing shunt or the electromagnetic shock attack icons; mid-pack dwellers should be armed with the traffic-parting barge and the protective shield; and cherry pick for nitro's speed bursts and the droppable mine to protect a lead. A modification loadout system offers vehicle enhancements such as stronger armor and attack-power upgrades for an additional competitive edge as well.

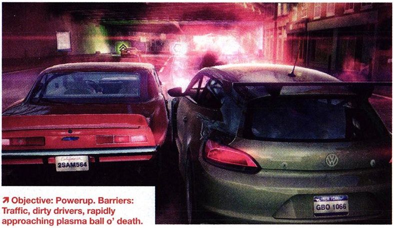
The single-player mode serves as a perfect training track for acclimating to *Blur's* initially bewildering race combat experience. Advancement through the nine levels requires mastering races, checkpoint and destruction challenges, and boss showdowns. Victories and impressive driving unlock events and higher-performance rides from the game's stable of 70 real-world cars. A limited variety of tracks and locations that become prematurely familiar and a diminishing challenge curve (the game seems to get easier as more capable cars are acquired) are the only letdowns.

But multiplayer is where *Blur* really shines. The eye-melting barrage of speed and pyrotechnics produced by up to 20-player online races is dizzying at times—as is the frequency of race position changes. Even seemingly insurmountable leads are constantly at risk against skilled rivals; we personally experienced several exhilarating victories and painful losses by mere hundredths of a second. When a game consistently delivers that brand of racing excitement, there's no way we're giving the keys back. | Roger Burchil

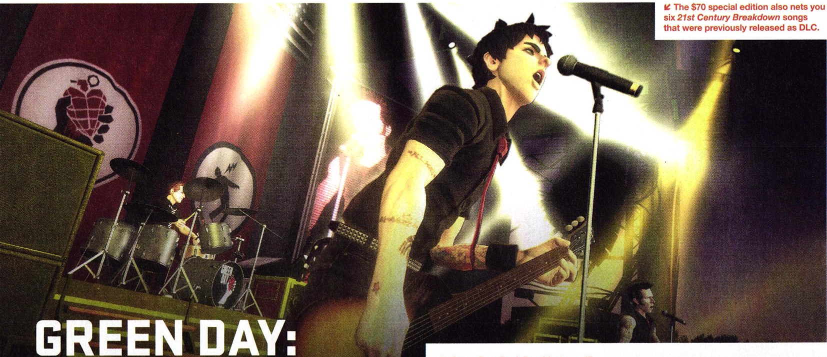
Rating ★★★★½

➘ Watch road; drive; dodge; attack; defend; check mirror; note damage... We need more eyes.





➚ Objective: Powerup. Barriers: Traffic, dirty drivers, rapidly approaching plasma ball o' death.



The $70 special edition also nets you six *21st Century Breakdown* songs that were previously released as DLC.

GREEN DAY: ROCK BAND

A bit lean, but still mean

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts / MTV Games **DEVELOPER:** Harmonix

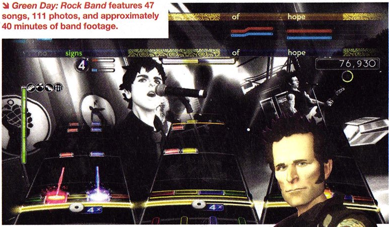
There are two ways of looking at *Green Day: Rock Band.* It's either a full-featured, high-value standalone track pack or a solid but relatively empty full-price game. It offers nothing new for rhythm game enthusiasts and provides only a moderate helping of Green Day fan service. Yet, it also has pitch-perfect presentation and an abundance of stellar musical content to fuel classic *Rock Band* gameplay.

The game contains three full albums—1994's breakout success *Dookie* as well as the more recent *American Idiot* and *21st Century Breakdown*—plus seven radio hits culled from the band's other records. The career mode is divided into three "concerts," each focusing on a different album. Select a show, play the first set of songs to unlock the next set, earn some band photos along the way, and eventually unlock the painfully dull video challenges—all of which force players to run through several previously unlocked tracks in a row.

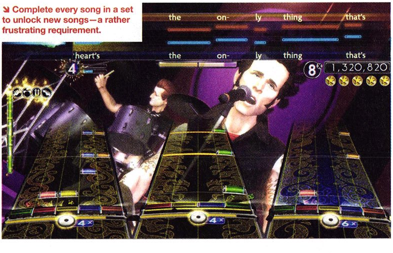
The bonus photos and videos are a pleasant enough reward, but did little to make us feel connected to the band or inspire us to continue unlocking new sets—literally one song at a time. The structure simply isn't very engaging, and the game offers no other options beyond career mode, quickplay, and a single competitive multiplayer mode: score duel. However, the music itself is a perfect fit for rhythm games—with ferocious drums, surprisingly intricate bass lines, super fast guitar parts, and simple, fun vocal harmonies—and the note tracks are absolutely spot-on.

Green Day: Rock Band is essentially a less ambitious and less extensive version of the game Harmonix built for The Beatles. It does, however, hold one truly significant advantage over the Fab Four: players can export all of the tracks to *Rock Band 2* for an extra $10. That means hardcore fans can enjoy watching lead singer Billie Joe Armstrong's avatar lip-synch, while for everyone else the game still serves as a fun, reasonably priced track pack—a welcome way to circumvent *Green Day's* stifling career mode. | Scott Butterworth

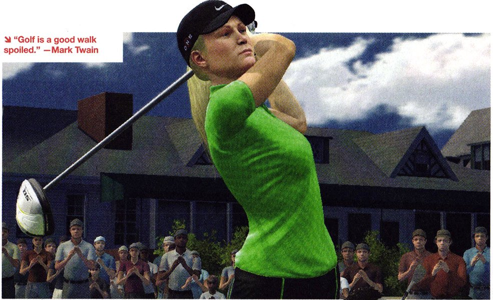
Rating ★★★½☆



Green Day: Rock Band features 47 songs, 111 photos, and approximately 40 minutes of band footage.



Complete every song in a set to unlock new songs—a rather frustrating requirement.



↘ "Golf is a good walk spoiled." —Mark Twain

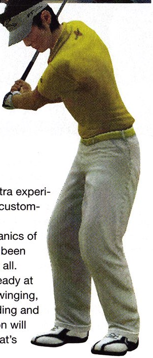
TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 11

Easy, Tiger!

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon

This is the 13th game in Electronic Arts' *Tiger Woods* franchise? Thirteenth! The danger with this robotic yearly franchise issuance is there's a risk of changing junk that works just fine simply for the sake of it. Thankfully, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11* doesn't fall foul to those kinds of shenanigans, and the new features it brings to the series are solid additions.

Aside from the five new courses and golfers, the big updates are the inclusion of the world famous Ryder Cup; online team play, which allows two teams of up to 12 players to face off; the new true-aim mode; a focus mechanic; and experience point progression system. There's a ton of smaller tweaks and changes too, such as the skills challenges allowing duffers to earn extra experience points for a custom-made golfer.

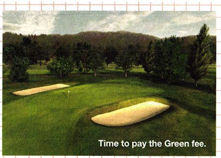


The core mechanics of the game haven't been nuked too hard at all. Those players already at home with club swinging, green reading, fading and drawing, and so on will be happy with what's on tap here. And they'll be equally happy to get to grips with the new focus mechanic, too. It gives more control over the outcome of shots by way of boosting swing power, accuracy, and adding an awesome putting preview. Focus depletes over time when used and slowly rebuilds, adding a new tactical aspect to the game.

The experience system is neat (Doesn't it seem like every game these days has one?), letting us tweak our golfer's stats and attributes. The new true-aim mode offers a more authentic golf playing experience (read: it's a lot harder) by doing away with any visual aiming cues. It will probably scare off casual players, and it's easily the weakest of *Tiger Woods 11's* new feature set.

Fans of the series won't be disappointed though, and unlike Tiger's recent media scandal, we think players should find *Tiger Woods 11* a pleasant diversion from the rigors of daily life. Unless, of course, daily life involves playing golf for real and earning more money than a Rockefeller. | Ed Kuznarski

Rating ★★★★☆



Time to pay the Green fee.

↑ EA Sports Online Pass starts *now*

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11 is the first game to use the new EA Sports Online Pass initiative. Purchase the game new and the pass is free. Buy it used and it'll cost $10. The pass is required to play *Tiger Woods 11* online, and allows access to special features, live tournaments, and in-game bonus content such as new clubs.

↑ Creating custom karts and drivers is still a gas.

MODNATION RACERS

A few laps shy of the finish

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Sony San Diego

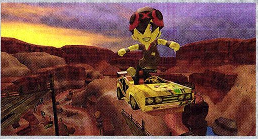
For all its creation-packed bells, whistles, and hood ornaments, *ModNation Racers* on PSP is like the Batmobile fitted with a Prius engine: Lots of show, lacking go.

The tracks are uninspired and memorable in a way that makes us say, "Hey, didn't we already play this?" The weapons didn't offer any surprises either; they might as well have kept their blueprint banana peel and turtle shell skins.

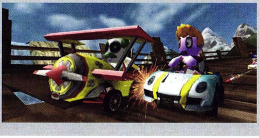
But the most underwhelming aspect is the driving. The expected kart racer pieces are there, but the sensation of speed was lacking and the handling seemed uninvolving and twitchy. The PSP experience *is* servicable, but lacks the PS3 game's verve.

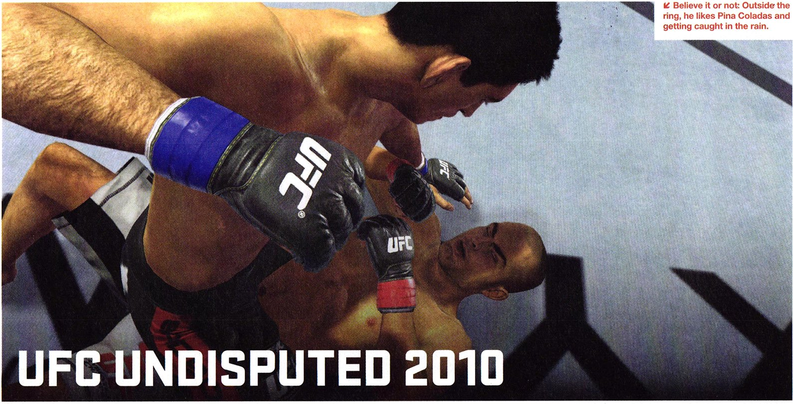
The creation elements were also problematic. The PSP's screen made it difficult to see and orient items we placed. We realize the design tradeoffs involved, but being creative shouldn't require a magnifying glass. | Jack Bennett

Rating ★★★☆☆



↑ *ModNation* on PSP never matches the PS3 game's heights.





↙ Believe it or not: Outside the ring, he likes Pina Coladas and getting caught in the rain.

UFC UNDISPUTED 2010

Grapplemania

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Yuke's

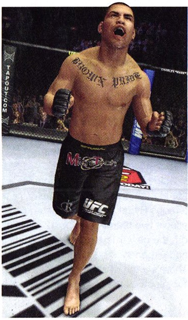
Riding the wave of success from *UFC 2009,* THQ has thrown its new Ultimate Fighting Championship title into the ring with the same bone-cracking ferocity and subtle detail that made last year's model such a breakout hit. Not ones to tap out early, developer Yuke's took all of the fans' comments seriously and tweaked away. The result is *UFC Undisputed 2010,* a title that may remain undisputed in quality for a long time to come.

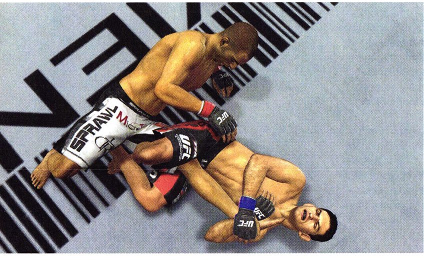
One of the more fascinating improvements is the new sway system, which brings about the most dramatic duck, weave, and counter combinations in the game. While the face buttons do the usual pummeling, the right-analog stick is used for nearly everything else including ducking, swaying, and grappling. This control scheme is an improvement from past efforts, but does require a considerable learning curve with its near-*Street Fighter II* level of complexity. Players may find themselves fumbling with the controller, or even inadvertently going back in time from the sheer amount of spinning the right thumbstick requires during a match.

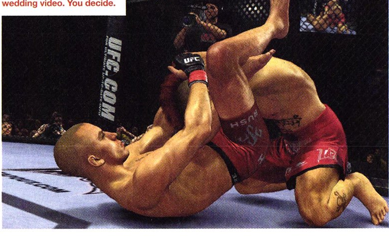
The irritating repetitive nature of the game's attempt at a "televised" presentation is a quibble. Fighters that repeat themselves over and over in post-match interviews hearken back to the 16-bit era (and not in a good way). But visually, we were suitably impressed—although the grapple animations do have a stiff mannequin-esque style about them.

What the game does very well is convey the fun, excitement, and intensity we want from our brawlers (sports-based or otherwise). *Undisputed* does a great job of bringing out that basest (and mostly male) instinct to beat another man into submission. With this alone the game captures the UFC essence perfectly, garnering *Undisputed* its accolades. | Russell Garbutt

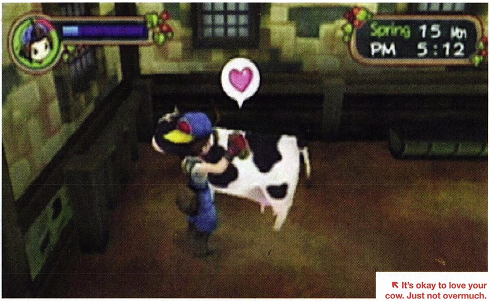
Rating ★★★★☆







↘ This is either a choke hold or someone's naughty wedding video. You decide.



↖ It's okay to love your cow. Just not overmuch.

HARVEST MOON: HERO OF LEAF VALLEY

Down on the farm

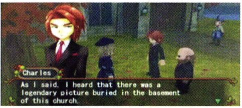
PSP **PRICE:** $29.99 **ESRB:** Everyone **PUBLISHER:** Natsume **DEVELOPER:** Marvelous Ent.

Fans of *Harvest Moon* might experience a bit of déjà vu while playing *Hero of Leaf Valley.* It's actually an enhanced remake of *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland,* which was released on PS2 way back in 2001. Natsume has updated the game with plenty of new features, though, so it won't feel *too* familiar.

The bulk of the game is spent raising money for a farm (by growing crops or doing odd jobs) and wooing the local female townsfolk. Given the simulation nature of the game, there's very little in the way of fast-paced action. Most of the jobs involve simply picking up and moving objects around, which invariably requires us to spend lots of time flipping through menus and juggling inventory items. Get around the fact that there's more mind-work than finger-work here and it's possible to find enjoyment in figuring out the best way to generate the most income. Beware, though: The game is clearly designed for *Harvest Moon* veterans. There's very little guidance after a farmer's plopped into town, so the learning is done mostly through trial-and-error, which can make *Leaf Valley* an intimidating destination for novices.

Frequent and annoying load-time delays slow down what's already a fairly leisurely paced game. Still, whenever we need a break from all the shooters out there, *Hero of Leaf Valley* is a charming way to sit for a spell and watch our crops grow. | Phil Theobald

Rating ★★★⯪☆


Charles
As I said, I heard that there was a legendary picture buried in the basement of this church.

Spring 10 Wd
AM 7:08

Put Away
Eat
Th

↙ Don't grow the wacky tobaccky.

↑ This is why men start drinking, right here.

IRON MAN 2

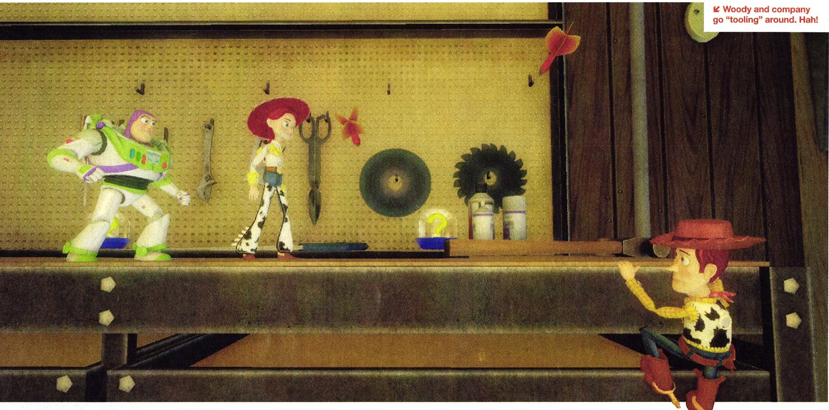
A little rusty

PSP **PRICE:** $29.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Sega **DEVELOPER:** High Voltage Software

Despite bearing the movie's namesake, *Iron Man 2* actually serves as a sequel to the recent superhero flick—so fans of Mickey Rourke's Blacklash are in for a disappointment. Also bound for disappointment: fans hoping that this portable game would improve on its thoroughly mediocre predecessor. Although the ability to don multiple suits of upgradable armor (including War Machine) is welcome, it doesn't make up for the dull gameplay through mostly empty levels. The controls are infuriatingly awkward with aiming performed via the PSP's face buttons and the woefully ill-conceived need to use the D-pad in conjunction with the analog stick on occasion. Factor in the semi-frequent bugs and *Iron Man 2* bears the all-too-familiar mark of a game rushed to meet its tie-in movie's release date. | Phil Theobald

Rating ★⯪☆☆☆

↑ That'll teach you to be fuel inefficient!



↙ Woody and company go "tooling" around. Hah!

TOY STORY 3

To infinity not so much

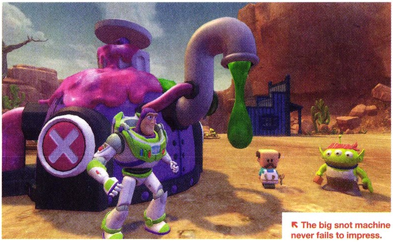
PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Disney Int. Studios DEVELOPER: Avalanche Studio

Beloved toys Woody, Buzz, and Jessie, plus assorted hangers-on make their triumphant return to videogames because, hey! mortgages won't pay themselves. Thankfully, developer Avalanche gets it at least half right in *Toy Story 3,* an adventure that's of two minds on how to do a movie-licensed game.

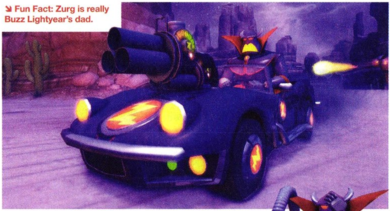
A straightforward story mode drops the grand triumvirate of cowboy, spaceman, and plucky cowgirl into a series of compact missions roughly mirroring the plot for the *Toy Story 3* film. It's here the developers try their hand at shooting, flying, platforming, rail-grinding, puzzle-solving, and stealth with uneven results. The Woody-centric adventure involving a mad tea party with a child's room rapidly flooding with coffee seems perfectly agreeable until it somehow morphs into a rail-riding challenge requiring the most brainless sort of schlepping to retrieve a series of batteries. Similarly, Buzz Lightyear's trek to the villainous Zurg's fortress is plagued by a punishing level of difficulty during the flight stage until it finally finds its stride as an adrenaline-fueled shooter.

More palatable by far is the Toy Box mode, a freeform adventure where players can explore, create, decorate, experiment, collect junk, unlock new stuff, customize characters and buildings, and have a grand time without time limits or a developer's misguided need to shoehorn in a new game mechanic every 3.5 minutes. A gleeful goofiness pervades this mode, with players able to punt aliens to their hearts delight, take on racing challenges on horseback or in cars, use goo to shrink or grow in-game objects, huck plastic army men, and blow up stuff real good with explosives. It's here *Toy Story 3* embraces all that's right and good with games and lets the toys have at it. This is where the playthings go to have fun, and it's where the game finds redemption. | Greg Orlando

Rating ★★★⯪☆



↖ The big snot machine never fails to impress.



↘ Fun Fact: Zurg is really Buzz Lightyear's dad.

➔ Feel the Buzz!

The inclusion of would-be world beater Zurg as an exclusive playable character in the PlayStation 3 version of *Toy Story 3* may be heralded as the greatest human achievement to date, outshining the moon landing (1969), the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights (1776 and 1791, respectively), the first human heart transplant (1967), the invention of the movable-type printing press (circa 1450), the Magna Carta (1215), and the establishment of the United Nations (1945).

↖ Neutering Puss had some unintended side effects.

SHREK FOREVER AFTER

An *unenchanted* kingdom

PS3 **PRICE:** $49.99 **ESRB:** Everyone 10+ **PUBLISHER:** Activision **DEVELOPER:** XPEC

Though it may be a decent—albeit brief and lackluster—diversion for a younger audience, we would liken the *Shrek Forever After* experience to a cautionary tale of the licensed movie game.

Based on the animated film, *Shrek Forever After: The Final Chapter,* the game has players helping Shrek and his pals fight across their fairytale kingdom against Rumpelstiltskin's efforts to magically alter reality and become king.

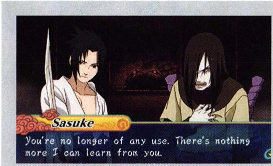
The gameplay features a top-down view as our antiheroes run around villages and castles, switching among Shrek, Fiona, Puss-in-Boots, and Donkey to solve puzzles and fight the fairytale goons trying to stop them.

Multiple players are needed to solve a few of the puzzles, but they're practically hidden within the levels, as if the designers didn't want them found. The environments are suitably fantastical and verdant, and the level design in most of the areas is well done. However, unattractive textures and clumsy animations undermine the visuals, and repeating sound bites and pop-rock music samples from previous films make the whole game feel hastily thrown-together. Even if it was intended for a younger demographic, this three- to four-hour experience (potentially longer, if anyone feels inclined to gather collectibles) is too grating to visit more than once.

We see the appeal in sitting down with a son or daughter and playing through a level or two, but it's likely that children will lose interest even before the parents' own feigned attention lapses. | David Murphy

Rating ★⯪☆☆☆

↗ Shrek prepares a delicious bombardment.



Sasuke
You're no longer of any use. There's nothing more I can learn from you.

↑ Pro Tip: Learning things reeks of effort!

NARUTO SHIPPUDEN: ULTIMATE NINJA HEROES 3

Ultimately uninspired

PSP **PRICE:** $39.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Namco Bandai **DEVELOPER:** CyberConnect2

Playing *Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Heroes 3* raises a question: Is it okay for a game to be content knowing its main selling point is fan service, or should it attempt to be more?

The focus here is on two- to four-player ninja-on-ninja beatdowns; battles are fierce, fast, and full of over-the-top special attacks, all rendered in a cel-shaded style that looks lovely on the PSP's screen. Unfortunately, due to a lack of depth and variety in character move-sets, the game falls short of its potential.

More divisive is the game's single-player mode, Master Road, which takes players through storyline arcs from the long-running anime saga. The gameplay presented is a mix of character battles—too many of which are filler—and poorly executed side-scrolling platforming stages; playing these segments often feels like little more than a required chore to reach the next cutscene or unlockable. | Eric L. Patterson

Rating ★★⯪☆☆

Gaara
38
1P
3P
4P
2P

↑ If they can't figure it out, we'll be damned if we can.

HOW TO...

BUILD AND WIN THE MONACO GP IN MODNATION RACERS

Want to recreate Formula 1's Monte Carlo track? Here's how.

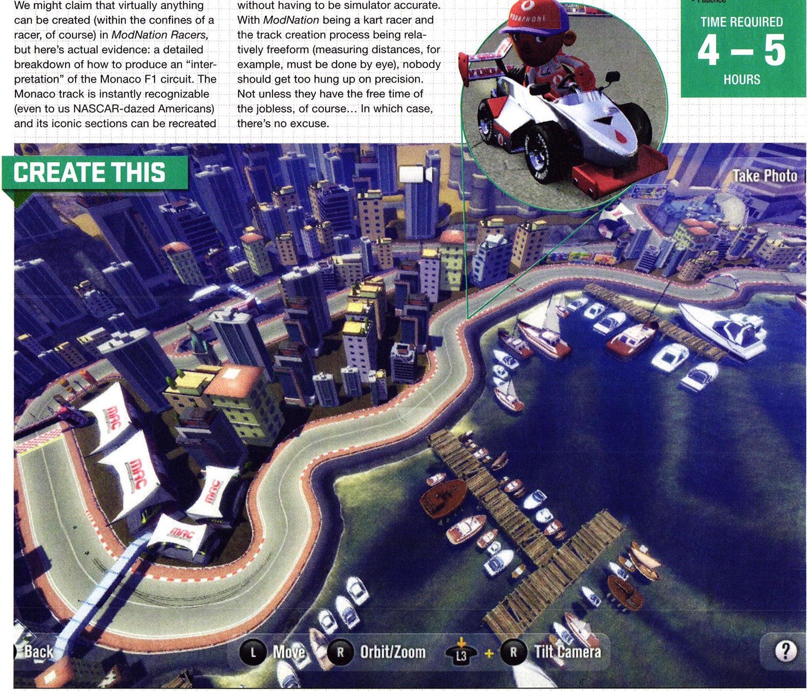
We might claim that virtually anything can be created (within the confines of a racer, of course) in *ModNation Racers,* but here's actual evidence: a detailed breakdown of how to produce an "interpretation" of the Monaco F1 circuit. The Monaco track is instantly recognizable (even to us NASCAR-dazed Americans) and its iconic sections can be recreated without having to be simulator accurate. With *ModNation* being a kart racer and the track creation process being relatively freeform (measuring distances, for example, must be done by eye), nobody should get too hung up on precision. Not unless they have the free time of the jobless, of course... In which case, there's no excuse.

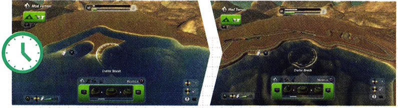
WHAT YOU NEED

- A PlayStation 3
- *ModNation Racers*
- Source material—trackside images, aerial circuit shots, and vehicle photos—just Google 'em.
- Patience

TIME REQUIRED
4 – 5
HOURS

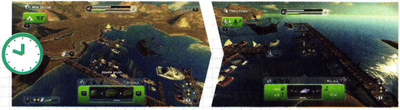
CREATE THIS





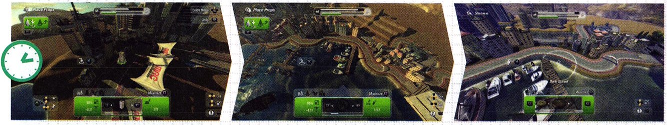
01 Laying the Track

ModNation Racers' track editor doesn't really do grids or measurements. Since the real-life Monaco circuit runs along the waterfront, establishing the harbor area helps form the general shape for the game version. Then, with a birds-eye photo of the race circuit positioned in front of the TV, just drive the track-laying machine around, trying your best to emulate the iconic sections as closely as possible.



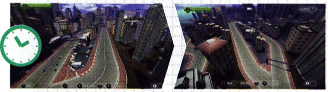
02 Creating the Harbor

One of the most stand-out features of the Monaco circuit is the boat-stuffed harbor—Port Hercule. It's not really necessary to create all these boats considering most are barely visible from behind the wheel, but it's easy to get a little carried away since *ModNation Racers* offers at least half a dozen size-transformable boat styles and a ready-made "wharf" piece. It looks a little rickety, but that's the *ModNation* charm.



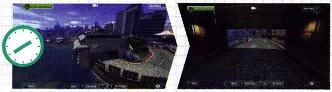
03 Building the City

Monaco circuit is surrounded by rolling hills, high-rise buildings, and billionaire's penthouses. With this track being built using the "seaside" environment, the prop selection that comes with it incorporates a wealth of skyscrapers and marina buildings, which can be resized and scattered throughout the area. Place a massive castle and a chateau to represent the Beau Rivage Hotel and the Hotel Mirabeau respectively. Using the terrain editor, create raised steps to give the impression of the buildings being built up the mountainside. *Try* not to go overboard with constructing more than needed…



04 Shaping the Pits

The creation of the pit lane is another example of artistic license. Here, the pit lane is actually a shortcut (built by placing a marker where you want the course to divert and reattach). You can't place track that bypasses the start/finish line, so it begins slightly early in this version. Place some race props like garages and semi trucks to give it a "pit like" feel.



05 Forming a Tunnel

Creating the iconic tunnel section provided a challenge. The solution is to form a large "Market Entrance" building and a barn building that allows karts to drive through it. Build both as large as possible and sandwich them together to form a kind-of tunnel. Hide the barn behind other buildings so you can't see it when racing around the track.

MODNATION RACERS FAQ

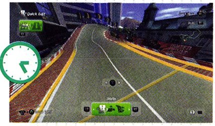
Is it easy to share my creations online?
Once it's saved, you can easily share it with the online community.

Are there restrictions to how much detail you can include in a track?
There is a memory limit shown by the two bars at the top of the screen. This Monaco track hit the limit.

It is easier than *LittleBigPlanet* to create something decent?
Much easier—a functioning track can be built in minutes. Adding in the details is the time-consuming part.

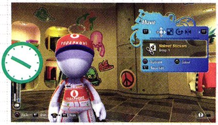
Will I need to unlock parts used by playing the single-player game first?
You don't need to, but some of the cooler items do require unlocking.

The load times are driving me nuts. Help!
United Front Games is working on a patch.



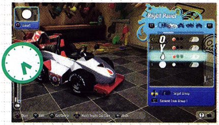
06 Ups and Downs

The only time concession made here is for the hills, cambers, and elevations of the circuit. Altering the track height can create the impression of an intense drop like on this vicious right-hand turn, but requires significantly more fiddling time. For racing purposes, a number of helpful flashing chevrons can be placed as well. More and more detail can always be added and tweaked later if you're so inclined.



07 Lookin' like Lewis

Creating F1 champ Lewis Hamilton is comparatively easy:
1 Selecting a race suit and cap and coloring it is easy. There are plenty of pre-made sponsor vinyls too.
2 Create a "Yodaphone" logo by forming a circle, teardrop, and appropriate letters.
3 A helmet would obscure Lewis' features, so add a simple nose, eyes, ears, and mouth selection to complete.

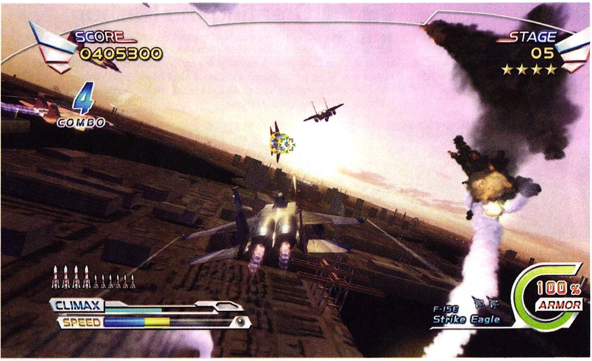


08 Making a McLaren

To finish off the project, make a McLaren lookalike kart for Lewis to drive. Here's how to do it:
1 Select an F1-style shell, race wheels with tire markings, plus a sporty seat and steering wheel.
2 Change the material property to "metal" to give the kart the trademark shine.
3 Use the same logos that worked for Lewis and add in wing mirrors. Done.

YODAPHONE
YODAPHONE

PlayStation Network Games



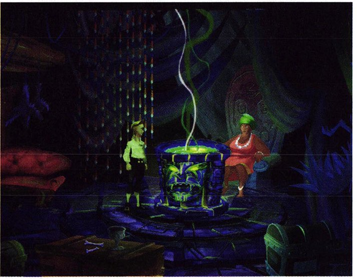
After Burner Climax

PSN **PRICE:** $9.99 **ESRB:** Everyone 10+
PUBLISHER: Sega **DEVELOPER:** Sega

− From the cheesy wailing guitars and '80s-style rock soundtrack to the flashy explosions and lightning fast twitchy gameplay, everything about *After Burner Climax* is a gratuitous nod to the heyday of coin-operated arcades. Hailing from that gaming era, we can appreciate both the vibe and the successful attempt at emulating the hyper-stimulating experience of mashing the joystick and pounding buttons while standing at an arcade cabinet.

This third-person on-rails flight shooter is fast and dizzying. Strapped into the cockpit of one of several jet fighters, we got a kick out of thundering through the skies spewing missiles and spraying machinegun fire at everything that moved amidst the clouds. Executing whirling barrel rolls to dodge barrages of incoming missiles and flying low through canyons littered with sentry turrets is thrilling stuff. But as crazy and exciting as everything is, the game is just too simplistic and way too short.

Though each stage is beautifully designed and varied, they only take a few minute to fly through. Levels are grouped into seamless clusters, and we literally beat the entire game in less than 10 minutes flat. Even with branching paths, secrets to uncover, and unlockable bonus options that can be applied to our ship, there's only a limited amount of replay fun to be found here. *After Burner Climax* isn't a bad game; it's just not enough game. | Nathan Meunier



The Secret of Monkey Island Special Edition

PSN **PRICE:** $9.99 **ESRB:** Everyone 10+
PUBLISHER: LucasArts **DEVELOPER:** LucasArts

+ Normally, slapping a fresh coat of paint on an old game might make us a bit cranky, but it's no biggie when it comes to a high-caliber comedy classic like *The Secret of Monkey Island.* This excellent point-and-click adventure special edition is brimming with laughs, and it's great to be able to switch between the new visuals and the old pixel art graphics on the fly. Guybrush Threepwood's quest to become a Mighty Pirate is practically a must for anyone with an appreciation for games history. | NM

PSone Fun

Can't miss classics—now available on PSN

STAR WARS
DARK FORCES
PlayStation

Star Wars: Dark Forces

PSN/PSP | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: Teen

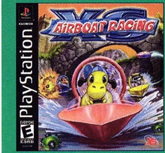
Blasting Stormtroopers as a rebel spy in this *Star Wars* first-person shooter brings back glorious nostalgia for the films.

JIGSAW MADNESS
PlayStation
XS Games

Jigsaw Madness

PSN/PSP | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: Everyone

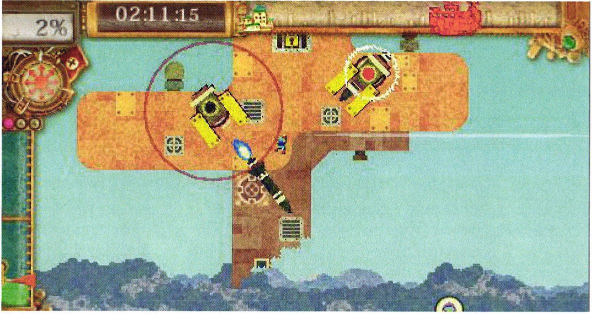
With over 150 pictures to put together, this jigsaw collection is bound to induce madness—but only the good kind.



XS Airboat Racing

PSN/PSP | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: Everyone

Animals apparently dig airboat racing, and why not? Ten different critters and plenty of courses make for some fast and furious water-bound race action.



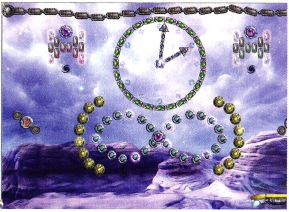
Patchwork Heroes

PSP **PRICE:** $9.99 **ESRB:** Everyone 10+ **PUBLISHER:** SCE **DEVELOPER:** Acquire

+ Starring a crack team of cute demolitions experts, *Patchwork Heroes* is an addictive little puzzle adventure game infused with tremendous style and an endearing presentation. Giant flying warships are invading the land, and the only way to stop them is to send in a heroic crew of goofy rebel carpenters wielding handsaws and bombs to tear the ships apart before they reach their targets. Marrying this silly idea with some solid and progressively challenging puzzle action makes for a "can't miss" experience.

With the clock ticking, we found thrashing warships by cutting pieces of them away in large chunks and rescuing hostages with our tiny team to be great fun. A certain percentage of each ship must be hewn away, and paring them down within the allotted time grows more intense as missile turrets, robotic monsters, and reinforced steel are thrown into their designs.

Powerups add new choices to the destructive mix. Using bombs sacrifices a team member, but it's about the only way to take out steel-reinforced sections of ships. Some pickups change the shape of bomb blasts, and there's also a cool "mojo" ability that grants the team invulnerability and a speed boost. Carving up steel behemoths is extremely satisfying, and the oddball interactions between characters earned chuckles. *Patchwork Heroes* is a unique breed and a real treat. | NM



Hyperballoid HD

PSN **PRICE:** $4.99 **ESRB:** Everyone **PUBLISHER:** Alawar Ent.
DEVELOPER: iSquare/Alawar

+ Brick-breaking games have been around for a long time, but *Hyperballoid HD* injects some new energy into the genre. It's basically a straightforward *Arkanoid*-style game featuring slick high-definition visuals. Interesting level designs and some unique brick physics are found alongside all the basic powerups, which include cannons, sticky paddles, and multi-balls. Despite a lack of surprises, the core gameplay and controls are tight, and tons of levels make this affordable title a good bargain. | NM

TECMO
Milicic

NBA Unrivaled

PSN **PRICE:** $14.99 **ESRB:** Everyone **PUBLISHER:** Tecmo Koei
DEVELOPER: A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. Games

− When done well, basketball can be a fluid and graceful sport. It's unfortunate that *NBA Unrivaled* trips on its own shoelaces and smashes its face into the court right from the get-go. There's nothing smooth about this ill-fated remake. The gameplay and controls feel herky-jerky and the player animations are robotic. Limited play modes only offer simple matches pitting various teams against one another. And good luck finding someone to play with online. | NM

Play On

Must-have add-ons from the PlayStation Store

Blue Toad Murder Files

Episodes 4-6 Bundle

Price: $14.99 | **ESRB:** Everyone 10+

The wacky detective puzzle-adventure continues with three new episodes loaded with mystery and intrigue. British humor and brain-bending conundrums abound.

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

Siege Expansion Pack

Price: $5.99 | **ESRB:** Mature

Players must defend against waves of opponents in the exciting new Siege mode. New Trophies, skins, and two fresh maps are just more icing on the Drake cake.

Modern Warfare 2

Stimulus Package

Price: $14.99 | **ESRB:** Mature

This meaty package contains maps galore. It features two tried-and-true maps from *Call of Duty 4*, three all new maps, and several new playlists.

ENTOURAGE: SEASON SIX

AVAILABLE: June 22
GENRE: Comedy
STUDIO: HBO

"Look at where we are. Did you ever think we'd have this?"

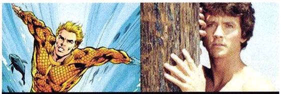
PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

If there was ever a show that mirrored the PTOM crew's lifestyle, it's *Entourage*—um, sans the fame, money, and women, of course. HBO's acclaimed series, about a young actor's celestial rise and his hometown buddies who come along for the ride, is perennially on our TV-watching "hit" list. Season six has star Vincent Chase (Adrian Grenier) reclaiming A-list status after appearing in Martin Scorcese's *Gatsby,* with BFF/manager Eric (Kevin Connolly), brother/bit-actor Drama (Kevin Dillon), and buddy/gopher Turtle (Jerry Ferrara) all fostering careers and relationships of their own. While Vince's caustic agent/confidant Ari Gold (the scene-stealing Jeremy Piven) is building his agency into an empire. Yup—it's definitely time to hang out with the boys again.

Why We're Watching

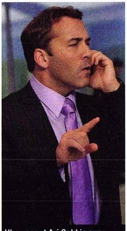
We admit it: It took us a while to warm up to Vince. He's just so…*pretty.* But his Zen-cool persona finally won us over—we'd kill to be his lackey now.



Entourage is frequently a mad confluence of real and fictional elements, but how is it that Vince's Aquaman movie is feigned while Patrick Duffy's *The Man from Atlantis* actually exists? So wrong.

This country has a great entourage-ial tradition of drinking and carousing. And we love America. Don't you?

Shhhhhhh…don't interrupt. We're ogling Sloan (Emmanuelle Chriqui). Man, she's way too hot for Eric. Just sayin', E...



Uber-agent Ari Gold is our role model, our Man template: "Let's hug it out, b-tch." Truer words were never spoken.

Top VDS Downloads

MOVIES
- *The Road*
- *Dear John*
- *Legion*
- *Avatar*
- *Daybreakers*

TV SHOWS
- *24: Season 8*
- *Lost: Season 6*
- *The Boondocks: Season 3*
- *Chuck: Season 3*
- *True Blood: Season 2*

↑ "No. Not today. I'm taking a personal day. P-T-*F'n*-O. Got it?"

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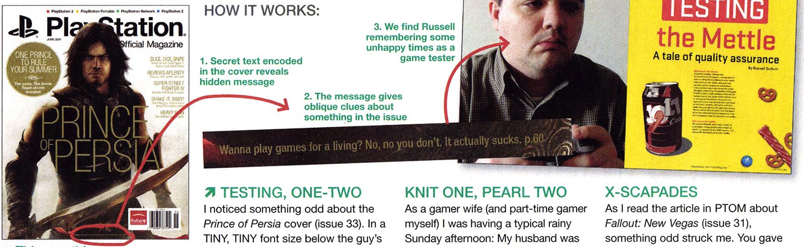
Letters


PlayStation
The Official Magazine
ONE PRINCE TO RULE YOUR SUMMER
PRINCE OF PERSIA
Wanna play games for a living? No, no you don't. It actually sucks. p.60
TESTING the Mettle
A tale of quality assurance

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Secret text encoded in the cover reveals hidden message
2. The message gives oblique clues about something in the issue
3. We find Russell remembering some unhappy times as a game tester

▲ This month's conversation starter

TESTING, ONE-TWO

I noticed something odd about the *Prince of Persia* cover (issue 33). In a TINY, TINY font size below the guy's sword is the following: "Wanna play games for a living? No, no you don't. It actually sucks." Now why exactly is that so small? Are you afraid of the reactions of all the depressed testers around the world? Will our minds subliminally pick this up and make us never to decide to become one? What magical powers do you hold, oh mighty gamers? (And I want to know, do you guys like heavy metal music?) | *Emily Sturgeon, Somewhere in Canada*

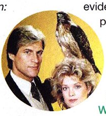
Emily, as you well know, subliminal advertising works very well. And we'd like you to join Scientology. We don't know much about it, but if you sign up, we'd probably get some sort of kickback. And we love money at PTOM as much as we do the musical stylings of AC/DC, Black Sabbath, Metallica, and Winger. We are just kidding about Winger, Emily. Or are we? But, seriously, join Scientology.

DEPT. OF WHAT IS SHE TALKING ABOUT?

"What magical powers do you hold, oh mighty gamers? (And do you guys like heavy metal music?)"

KNIT ONE, PEARL TWO

As a gamer wife (and part-time gamer myself) I was having a typical rainy Sunday afternoon: My husband was playing *White Knight Chronicles* while I was crocheting and glancing through the fine publication *Crochet Today.* Imagine my surprise to see a little picture of *PlayStation: The Official Magazine* with *God of War III* on it in the Adventures in Crochet section.



I was pleased to see an article by Gary Steinman, a guy who does guy things, about crochet. Real men do crafts. | *Keri Oleniach, Dunellen, NJ*

Real men watch *Manimal,* Keri. Real men also pine for the return of *Manimal*. Maybe Gary should knit us a handsome sweater vest. You know, like Manimal would wear.

Also, real men's adventures in crochet usually involve less crafts and more explosions and hurt feelings. We're just saying.

X-SCAPADES

As I read the article in PTOM about *Fallout: New Vegas* (issue 31), something odd struck me. You gave several pictures in the article, and in one there was a list of the controls. It stood out to me that the controls were from an Xbox 360—so, evidently, you had used an Xbox to play the game. Could you please explain to me why you don't just use recording software on PS3, and use that software for pictures and such? | *Wilford Shriver, Parts Unknown*

We offer the following excuses for our slip-up: Gremlins, the sun was in our eyes, it was either that or run pictures of shirtless Ed McMahon, alien mind-control, and mimes.

In all seriousness, or at least with as much as we're able to muster: When a game is still early in its development (as *Fallout: New Vegas* is), *PTOM* sometimes has to rely on screenshots provided by the publisher—and we'd rather show you as much of the game as

Send your letters, blocks of cheese, and issues of *Brother Power: The Geek* to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com or the intern gets it!

We welcome reader photos, letters, and stories ("Submissions"), however, we cannot promise to publish any Submission and none will be returned. Neither PlayStation: The Official Magazine ("PTOM") nor Future US, Inc. shall be liable for loss or damage to any Submission. By sending in your Submissions to PTOM you represent and warrant that you own or otherwise have all necessary rights to the Submissions to allow us to publish them in PTOM and as follows. You grant PTOM a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right and fully sub-licensable license to use, copy, distribute, publish, modify, adapt, translate, and store, your Submissions, in any form, format, or medium, of any kind now known or later developed and to use your name, likeness, and any other information in connection with the use of the Submission you provide.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

HOW TO SWINDLE YOUR OLD MAN OUT OF $200

I'm a new PlayStation 3 owner. My dad said there was no point in getting that idiot box because a new one will come out in the next year and I'll be scrambling to buy it. Since I know about Sony and the PlayStation 2's life cycle, I decided to make a bet with my Dad for $200 saying that my PS3 will last for *at least* two more years minimum before I get a new console. My poor Dad thought the PS2 lasted for a mere two-and-a-half years... If only he knew, I wouldn't have robbed him of $200. | *Sameer Gilzay, Toronto, ON*

It takes balls of steel to swindle your old man out of $200, Sameer. And although you may win the Worst Son Award for 2010 through 2016, you are also a shoo-in to win our coveted Letter of the Month Award.

BALLS OF STEEL

Congratulations, as you've won some neat free stuff, none of which will allow you to cope with the debilitating guilt you will someday feel at having cheated dear old dad out of his cough syrup money.

possible, even if it has a ghastly right-bumper prompt in the image.

POINTS TAKEN

Regarding the "Are Videogames Getting Too Complex" debate (issue 32), it really just came off as one giant picture and two tiny arguments. Come on, guys, write more, show less. As veteran gamers and professional journalists within the gaming industry, yours is a much more interesting and valid viewpoint, no matter what you may think. Elaborate, and get into it!

Plus, Greg Orlando was on a roll this issue. He came out of nowhere for me. The entire magazine had a whole new character due to some of the hilarious stuff he mentioned in such articles as: *Splatterhouse* and *Naughty Bear* previews, and the *Yakuza 3* review. There were some new phrases I've never heard and, really, a new style I've never read in a gaming magazine.

For *The Lord of the Rings: War in the North,* you should make sure the biting-off-of-the-head-and-chewing is still featured in the game when it releases. I want someone to hold these guys to their supposed conviction that they will make a hardcore game.

In the *Moto GP* review, writer Chris Antista mentions the *Madden* series. I say, go ahead and scold them and any other greedy sports franchises. It's absolutely ridiculous to constantly release what is essentially roster updates and slight tweaks and throwaway gameplay additions and sell it as a $60 game every single year. It's not the companies that need to be convinced they are unnecessary, it's the consumers. Sure you can say it's up to the people if they want to waste their money, but I think you guys can serve a greater purpose than to tell them about all the stuff they can waste their money on. You can be advocates for consumers.

In the *FF* "Monster Mash," the writer kept saying "A *FF*" when referring to any *Final Fantasy.* But it should be "an *FF.*" The letter F is pronounced "ef," a vowel exists there. If it was pronounced as just the letter at the beginning of a given word, it would be more like a leaky tank of oxygen, "ffffffffffff." | *Shane, Akron, OH*

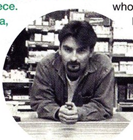
HOW TO MAKE A PTOM

I am Joshua Magill, I have been wanting to start a gaming magazine here in Kansas City, Kansas, and I was wondering if you could give me any input on how *PlayStation: The Official Magazine* got started and any good tips you might have for me too would be of great help. | *Joshua Magill, Kansas City, KS*

Former bootblack turned publishing magnate C. Winchester Steinman founded the two-penny broadsheet *PlayStation: The Official Magazine* in 1742, roughly 252 years before the release of the first PlayStation. So the lesson to be learned here is to follow your dream, even if you have nothing to write about for two-and-a-half centuries.

As far as making a magazine, well, get some good friends together and start writing. You can do great layouts with QuarkXpress or Adobe InDesign, and printing places such as Kinko's can help you print your masterpiece.

Good luck, Joshua, and remember to send us your first issue.



BALLS OF STEEL

You know what lifetime *Dragon Ball Z* fans have wanted for a long time? A *Dragon Ball/Superman* crossover. And not just a crossover, but a battle to the death between Son Goku and Superman.

The *Dragon Ball Z/Superman* crossover is like a match made in heaven. But no animating company has ever tried it. What with the copyrights and legal work, it would be difficult. Not to mention the fact that the only plausible storyline is for the two to fight, tie, and take on a greater power, which is one of the most irritating plotlines out there.

The way around this, though, would be to make a crossover videogame: Dragonball Z: The Arrival of Superman (or something equally corny). | *J.C. Chambers III, Parts Unknown*

We at *PTOM* had a dream, too. And that dream was for someone to write a letter about a Dragon Ball/Superman videogame, so we could make a delicious reference to balls of steel. You know, like we just did. Twice. And now that our lifelong dream has been fulfilled, I think we can all agree it's time for cake. Sweet, sweet cake.

Mission Accomplished!

MISTAKEN I-"DANTE"-TY

I have never written to you before, but your mistake in the June 2010 (issue 33) letters section was awesome! Darren wrote in to ask you who would win a fight between Dante and Kratos. You took the time to publish his letter, give a political answer, and even follow it up with great graphics…but you were using the WRONG Dante. In his letter, he clearly stated "sword-wielding half-demon." That's our favorite demon killer from *Devil May Cry.* Not the protagonist in *Dante's Inferno.* I just found it hilarious that you would do that whole half-page work up and get the characters wrong. | *Joy Stephens, Parts Unknown*

Rest assured, we have jettisoned the offending editor into space. He is currently orbiting Ganymede.

Putting the Wit into Twit

Yes, the entire PTOM staff has finally stumbled onto something called Twitter. Follow us so we'll feel loved.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

GARY STEINMAN
EDITOR IN CHIEF
@TINYMANRAGES

GREG ORLANDO
EXECUTIVE EDITOR
@GORLANDOPTOM

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR
@ARTKENPTOM

ROGER BURCHILL
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PLAYSTATION: THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE
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Correction Box

In our last issue (34), *Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock* was incorrectly labeled *Guitar Hero 6.* Remorseful Spidey regrets the error and blames it on that darned Paste-Pot Pete.

Et Cetera All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

The Expendables

Movie | Ticket

Sly Stallone, Jason Statham, Jet Li, Dolph Lundgren, Randy Couture, Steve Austin, Terry Crews, Mickey Rourke—with appearances by Bruce Willis and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Roger's Man card expires Aug. 13 if he misses this flick.

STALLONE
STATHAM
LI
LUNDGREN
COUTURE
AUSTIN
CREWS
ROURKE
THE EXPENDABLES
AUGUST 13

Squadron Supreme

Graphic novel | $29.99

The superheroes in the Squadron Supreme decide to save their world by taking it over. What follows is fodder for a story that rivals *Watchmen* in sheer entertainment value. Heed Greg's advice on this: Read this or be forever damned.

SQUADRON SUPREME

924 Gilman

Music venue | Rent money

Do your part to help save 924 Gilman, the profoundly important DIY music venue in Berkeley, Calif. Due to an unexpected rent hike, the club that gave us Green Day can barely afford to keep its doors open and needs help to stay afloat. Be like Scott and visit 924Gilman.org to get involved!

Illusione cg4

Cigar | $7.80/stick

On a recent balmy spring day in the Bay Area, Gary turned to Ken and said, "I question your commitment to smoking." Later that day, the not-so-dynamic duo took a stroll around the PTOM campus while puffing away on the sublime Illusione cg4. Hey, kids, don't smoke. It's bad for you. Unless you're Ken and Gary.

cg4
White Horse 49 x 5 5/8

Qore Episode 26

How many frequent flier miles to Alpha Centauri?

From the planet of Helghan, all the way to Japan, we're covering a lot of ground in the July episode of Qore! We start with a look at *Killzone 3,* which is taking the first-person shooter to all new dimensions. The PlayStation Move is also on deck, and we get some hands-on time with the new controller. Then it's back to Japan, where we take a peek at the new action-adventure title, *Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom,* and also show you the hottest geek hangouts in Osaka! Phew, I'm exhausted just telling you about it! ;) **—Veronica Belmont**

Qore is available for purchase from the PlayStation Network for $2.99 an episode, or $24.99 for a 13-episode subscription. Subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content each month.

qore™

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3
THE BOUNTY HU
UNRAT
JUDE LAW FOREST
REPO
CLASH OF THE TITANS
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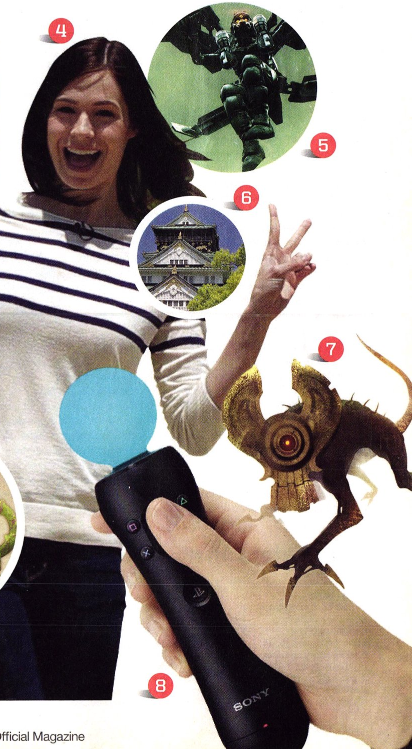

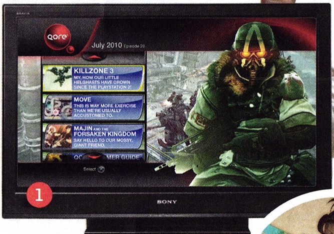

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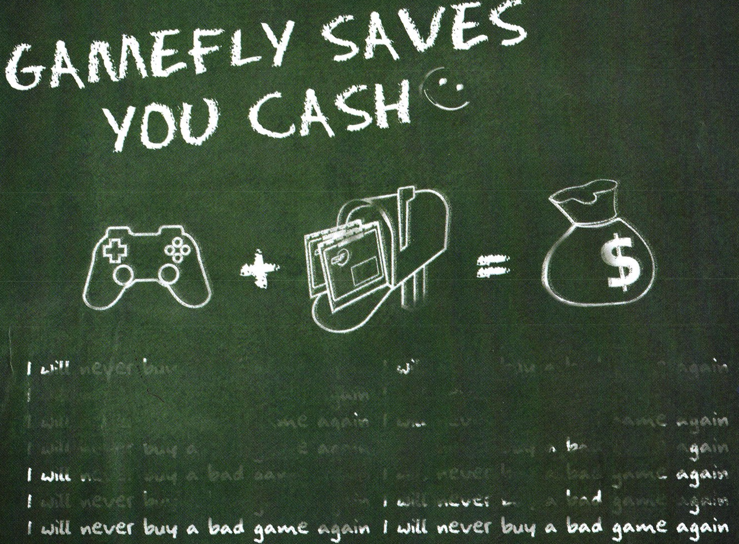
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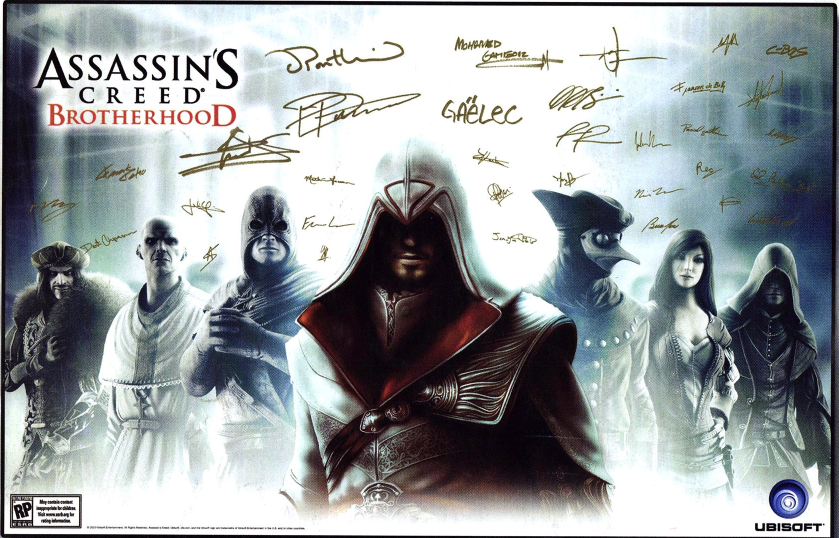
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